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COMMONWEAL

BOOKS

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on Anne Tyler
& Elizabeth Spencer

GEORGE HIGGINS
on Tom Geoghegan

JAMES T. FISHER
on the bishops
in politics

DAVID HOLLENBACH
on Mary Ann Glendon

VICTOR A. KRAMER
on Walker Percy

PAUL KRANTZ
on Guatemala

SEXTON'S LAST TAPES

Breaking the seal of
the therapists's code

JAMES F. KEENAN

DEAD, BUT STILL WITH US

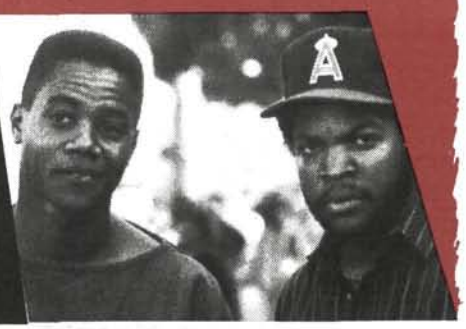
Barthelme's fading
Catholic intuitions

PAUL GILES

RACE IN AMERICA: A new story?

Fred Siegel, Don Wycliff,

Paul Baumann, the Editors



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CORRESPONDENCE

Distorting 'rescuers'

Port Charlotte, Fla.

To the Editors: In your editorial ["Bloody Kansas," September 27] you say of Operation Rescue that "its physical harassment of women seeking abortion only hurts its estimable cause." You do not make clear just what you refer to by "physical harassment." Is it that you have accepted the use of that terminology by NOW and NARAL to refer to blocking clinic doors? If you mean more than that, you have bought into the mass media's distortion of what occurs at rescues. In the fifteen or so rescues I have witnessed in the past several years, including several this summer in Wichita, I have never seen physical harassment by rescuers, nor have I heard credible reports of such harassment in other places—although, as John Leo has written in *U.S. News and World Report*, rescuers have sometimes been subjected to much outright physical abuse by the police and by pro-abortion persons. You ought to know better at this late date than to pass on such misinformation without checking it out.

MARK GRONSCESKI

'Rescuers' distort

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: Your editorial "Bloody Kansas" [September 27] fails to point out that Operation Rescue's forcible interdiction of entry to clinics contravenes our Christian belief in the unique moral identity and personal freedom of the individual person, the very belief upon which we base our efforts on behalf of the unborn child. Conscience is never to be coerced, for whatever cause.

The editorial also obscures the legal issue. Operation Rescue's program is *not* a peaceful protest, nor an exercise in civil disobedience to educate the public on a specific moral issue. Its initiators and organizers have simply adopted the tactics of the post-Civil War white supremacists, who perceived that by defying local and state laws they could frustrate the efforts of the newly freed black slaves to exercise their liberty. Similarly, in Wichita and elsewhere, Operation Rescue has sought to overwhelm the capacity of local authorities to ensure civil peace and order.

Thus, there is nothing "dubious" about Federal Judge Patrick Kelly's application of the law enacted by Congress in 1871 to authorize federal assistance where local authorities were overwhelmed by organized lawlessness. The issue in 1871 was not the civil rights of blacks but society's right to civic peace and order. Operation Rescue's tactics raise precisely that same issue.

The editorial evidences the degree to which the civic confusions of our Catholic bishops becloud that which, happily, is crystal clear to the *historically* well-informed Judge Kelly. From "A" to "Z," Catholics have let the pro-abortion forces frame the public discussion. Catholic doctrine and social teaching are graphically contradicted in Operation Rescue's direction and tactics. *Commonweal* needs to do some more incisive examination of these confusions.

MARGARET C. PARSONS

The Israel lobby

Colts Neck, N.J.

To the Editors: Commonweal is right [editorial, June 14; editors' reply, July 12] about the influence in Congress of the pro-Israel lobby, and Eugene Fisher's letter [September 13] is overreaching in its criticism. Witness the September 15 report by Adam Clymer in the *New York Times*; some sixty political action committees gave $4 million to pro-Israel House and Senate candidates in the 1989 election campaign, putting them on a par with real estate and oil and gas interests and making them "the biggest ideological group" among such committees. (Anti-abortion and pro-abortion groups together gave only $750,000 in the same campaign.) Clymer describes the lobby as "one of the most powerful" in the capital, and says of its most important component, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, that its lobbyists "can get congressional attention in a hurry," adding that "[f]ew lobbies do it as well." All this is well known, and has been documented at book length by other competent observers; Dr. Fisher protests too much.

(REV.) WILLIAM J. BAUSCH

Elie is almost right

Syracuse, N.Y.

To the Editors: As a priest born in 1960 and ordained for three years, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed Paul Elie's "The Everlasting Dilemma" [September 27]. Now "thirtysomething," I too find it odd that I'm considered a "young" Catholic. I heartily agree with Mr. Elie that the real divide is not so much age as whether or not one experienced the "pre-Vatican II church." Mr. Elie is correct in that we desperately need to share the riches of our whole tradition. An exchange of views between us who are products of Vatican II and those who made the Vatican II church, in all its extremes and centers, would be very helpful.

Yet I find that something is preventing this exchange from occurring: fear. Fear that I have seen in the eyes and heard in the remarks of many older Catholics when

(Continued on page 669)

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COMMONWEAL

Courting diversity

Whatever one's views on the veracity or possible significance of Professor Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas, it is widely agreed that the confirmation process showed the Democratic party to be divided and irresolute. On a more subtle level the Thomas hearings may also have been a watershed event in American race relations. According to opinion polls, traditionally Democratic black voters rallied to Thomas's side in proportions (2-1) similar to whites, and this despite Anita Hill's impressive demeanor and Thomas's Republican politics. Clearly Thomas, only the second African-American to sit on the Supreme Court, is a powerful symbol of black achievement and status, and his almost ritualized trial-by-ordeal brought to the surface profound and contradictory forces at work in race relations in the United States. In defending his "good name" against Hill's allegations, Thomas seemed to regain his own voice and to speak in a language that many Americans viscerally understood and sympathized with. Thomas's challenge to traditional black leadership and by extension to the liberal Democratic agenda cannot easily be dismissed.

To be sure, the nomination of a black conservative was a cynical act by a president who, lest we forget, voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Democrats who favor racial preferences in employment and schooling were faced with a racial standard themselves. But there was plenty of irony to go round. Justice Thomas likes to say that "only in America" could the grandson of a black sharecropper rise to the highest court in the land. But it is also true that only in America could a black nominee to the Supreme Court, married to a white woman, find among his principal supporters Southern white conservatives who, like Senator Strom Thurmond, once filibustered for segregation and fulminated against miscegenation. For anyone with an historical memory, it was an extraordinary, if not surreal sight to see the desiccated Thurmond gumming his praise of Thomas. Americans have lived through a revolution in race relations that would have torn most societies apart. Anomalies abound.

Democrats, led by black Americans themselves, deserve most of the credit for this progress, and for the opportunities Clarence Thomas now extols. Doubtless his rejection of the rhetoric of victimization as well as affirmative action and other liberal remedies for discrimination smacks of betrayal to the Democrats. A good deal of the passion attached to the hearings was the result of Thomas's appearing to have turned away from that history, eager to reap the rewards of the civil rights movement without giving due credit.

But if history tells us anything, it is that the politics of race is never simple. Black Americans have embraced many different strategies to combat racism, from the accommodationism of Booker T. Washington to the separatism of Malcolm X. Ideological labels cannot adequately explain the achievements or shortcomings of such figures.

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That is probably true in Thomas's case as well. Whatever his personal failings, Thomas may represent something much more substantial than the mere "Uncle Tom" or flamboyant opportunist his critics would have us think he is.

Unabashedly "mainstream" values—of hard work, personal accountability, family, religious piety, patriotism—are manifest in the story of Clarence Thomas's life. Many black Americans think that story desperately needs to be heard. As Don Wycliff notes in his review of Stephen Carter's *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (p. 659), the "black establishment" has routinely suppressed black conservative voices as "traitorous." Wycliff quotes Professor Carter: "In an era in which a third of black people still live in poverty, when the inner cities are besieged by drugs and crimes, when nearly a quarter of our children are themselves having children, we cannot afford the luxury of insisting, in the name of solidarity, that any of our problems has a single, unchallengeable answer."

Clarence Thomas, it seems, is an embodiment of the syncretistic political approach Carter advocates. Indeed, the Thomas hearings brought before the nation representatives of a new generation of black Americans whose professional achievements and political diversity made a profound impression. No monolithic black community of predictable liberal views exists. New voices are finally being heard.

Doubtless Thomas's status as symbol of black hopes and aspirations confounded certain liberal expectations. But that need not have been the case. Representative democracy necessarily entails a respect for the values of a self-governing people, and elections are designed to bring those values forcibly to bear. As a political appointment, Thomas may be a very hopeful sign indeed. Orlando Patterson, the Harvard sociologist, saw the hearings as an indication of the vibrancy of democratic culture, not its nadir (*New York Times*, October 20). He described the hearings as a "ritual of inclusion...[a] public cultural affirmation of what had already been politically achieved: unambiguous inclusion; unquestioned belonging. The culture of slavery is dead."

Patterson offers a bold and unorthodox analysis, one that helps make sense of the hearings' compelling drama. The paradoxical truth, he writes, is that "America, while still flawed in its race relations...is now the least racist white-majority society in the world....[it] offers more opportunities to a greater number of black persons than any other society, including all those of Africa."

Civil rights leaders, black and white, need to acknowledge these remarkable realities. They need to explore what the outpouring of support for Clarence Thomas tells us about racial progress in America, and about the many values black and white Americans share. The rhetoric of competing grievances must accede to a rhetoric of partnership and assumed inclusion; the demand for rights must be yoked to the social workhorse of reciprocal duties. Only duties seen to be held in common—to uphold the law, to civility, to children—can draw us together.

Much remains to be done about racial and social injustice in the United States, and contrary to Republican claims and Clarence Thomas's rhetoric much must be done by government. But there is also much that has been accomplished, or so an increasing number of black Americans are telling us. Democrats, who have a record to be proud of on this score, must learn to speak on behalf of the disenfranchised in a way that honors what Americans hold most dear. That's not a lost language for liberals, just a rusty one.

"If you can put your complaint in the form of a constitutional amendment and get two-thirds of the states to approve of it, we may be able to help you."

AN IMMENSE STEP

George Bush's historic September 27 nuclear-arms reduction announcement, and Mikhail Gorbachev's positive response eight days later—pushing beyond the Bush proposals in significant respects—signify an immense step for humanity. Bush and Gorbachev's "disarmament by example" not only advanced the nuclear meltdown but offered a possible model for other forms of arms reduction: conventional as well as chemical and biological.

The nuclear cleanup will take decades. The price of building down and verifying will not be cheap, and the final standards agreed to—an adequate minimal deterrent and eventually, we hope, abolition—will take years to hammer out. But Bush and Gorbachev have taken a new course. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney put it succinctly: We "have taken a different approach than I would have advocated even a few months ago."

Simultaneous with Bush's announcement, a nuclear-era subplot was being acted out in a Baghdad parking lot. Nuclear proliferation—the bastard child of the superpowers' love affair with nuclear weapons—was making its claims. For four days, forty-four UN inspectors were held hostage because they had verified that Iraqi nuclear capability was imminent. Here was further proof that the world's reliance on nuclear weapons has meant their gradual spread, via a chain reaction between rivals: U.S.-USSR; USSR-China; China-India; India-Pakistan; etc.

The nuclear era has so skewed our perceptions—moral as well as political and military—that it will take time to right them. Despite the 1983 call of the American Catholic bishops for the

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abandonment of our first-use policy, U.S. defense policy still includes its acceptance. In his September speech, President Bush made no reference to America's most deadly and least-vulnerable, first-strike force, the Trident submarine fleet. Furthermore, our vast economy of nuclear enterprises, technicians, and personnel, able to test and develop such weapons, remains intact. The Department of Energy currently wants to build a new reactor to produce tritium; the cost: $5-$10 billion.

That politicians and moralists—for decades—could have threatened global Armageddon to save "our part" of the world may have seemed a necessary evil, but their arguments and legitimations have eroded our sense of moral limits. Furthermore, the funds expended have siphoned off resources from other essential undertakings. As if from habit, in his September 27 speech Bush called for additional funding for both the B-2 Stealth bomber and SDI. Congress has rightly challenged the rationale for both expenditures.

What is still needed is a new way of thinking and acting that sharply departs from the policy and pursuits of the last forty years. The guiding principles should be global cooperation based on the primacy of international law; defense policies predicated on truly defensive rather than offensive war-fighting capabilities; a ban on nuclear and biological-chemical weapons; and limitations on conventional weapons. Last year, according to a report of the Congressional Research Service, $41.3 billion in arms sales were made to third-world countries, with the U.S. selling a record $18.5 billion. The report noted that these are likely to increase because of the success of U.S. weaponry in the Gulf War—a war that compellingly demonstrated the danger of such arms sales. One first step in dealing with this massive and dangerous trade is to take up a recent UN recommendation to register all arms transfers with the UN.

Not since the end of World War II has there been such an opportunity for progress in disarmament. As the recent Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty demonstrates, it is now possible to have more defense with fewer arms and at less cost. To add further momentum to nuclear disarmament, the U.S. should abandon its first-use policy and join Gorbachev's call for halting the production of all fissionable materials for weapons. To underscore the need of a universal test ban treaty, the U.S. should join the USSR and put an end to all nuclear testing. Further nuclear reductions should be coordinated and verified, and the sale of ballistic missiles strictly curtailed. Antiballistic missile systems must adhere to the ABM Treaty until reduced nuclear stockpiles are at such levels that the systems would actually diminish the threat of nuclear exchange. Finally, the peace-keeping forces of the UN and the role of international law must be enhanced as arbiters of international disputes.

Designing foreign and domestic policies in keeping with such a formula will be a major challenge. But we have seen that immense steps are possible and that a few more are needed.

ET CETERA

HE SHOULD MAYBE SUE The "Metropolitan Diary" column, appearing Wednesdays in the *New York Times*, sometimes tempts us to larceny, this time (October 2) irresistibly. It tells the story of "Tamara Pristin's friend from abroad" who, while visiting New York, was confronted by a mugger. He simultaneously grabbed for her gold chain and gave her a push; to steady herself, she grabbed at him and inadvertently pulled off the gold chain he was wearing. Not noticing his loss, the mugger ran off. Next day the visitor consulted a jeweler and learned that her new chain was 18-karat gold. Her old one was costume jewelry.

NO ALTAR GIRLS?

HEY, BISHOP!
EXPLAIN IT TO ELLEN GRACE

Only one of my children has ever wanted to serve on God's altar, my daughter, Ellen Grace, who has not even received her First Communion. Several years ago, when our parish did not have enough boys willing to serve on the altar, our pastor began training girls. Ever since, they have served responsibly and well. But now, the new bishop of Orlando, Norbert Dorsey, has told the pastors that female servers are no longer welcome on the altar. His reason: The faithful must align themselves more fully with the teachings of Rome.

When Bishop Dorsey made his pronouncement, our parish had twenty-two boys and eighteen girls serving regularly at Mass. The female servers are young, still in grammar school. But as one parishioner remarked to me, they have "such grace on the altar." *Seeing* them has been a source of grace for me, an outward sign of growth in the church, in its acceptance of women. So I was delighted when my Ellen, six years old, asked not if she could serve on the altar, but *when*. Now, however, I find myself perplexed and angry: What do I tell her?

My friends, many of them women, remind me that the church

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must necessarily move slowly; they advise me to be patient. But I am not patient. Forbidding girls on the altar seems an act of hostility toward women, a backward step that pushes me away from the Body of Christ.

I take hope in the knowledge that not all American bishops agree with Bishop Dorsey. Tim Unsworth writes in *U.S. Parish* (October 1990), that unless the local bishop specifically forbids female altar services, approximately one-half of Catholic parishes seem to use girl servers. Bishop Charles E. Herzig of Tyler, Texas, has pointed out in *Catholic East Texas* (May 11, 1990) that although the 1980 "Instruction" of the Sacred Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship disallowed women as altar servers, the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law dropped a 1917 canon restricting ministry at the altar to males. "Most people seem to understand," Bishop Herzig writes, "that their [altar girls'] attendance at the altar is simply a service, and certainly is not one of the official ministries in which the girls have been installed officially by the church." He concludes that women routinely lector and serve as eucharistic ministers in our parishes. "If you can do the greater, you can do the lesser," he notes.

The bishops know, as we all do, that the American Catholic church depends on women to do the greater and the lesser work of the faithful. We are lectors and eucharistic ministers, we feed the hungry and visit the sick, and most of us do this work in addition to housework and employment outside the home. We continue to bring our skills and our gifts back to our church because the need is there, because our faith teaches us the law of love and its expression in service.

Growing up Roman Catholic in northern Florida, I don't remember ever wanting to be a priest (a bishop, perhaps, and certainly the pope). But I would gladly have donned cassock and surplice to replace my brothers on the altar, and I knew the Latin prayers by heart. I loved then, as I do now, mystery and ritual and being close to the center of the liturgical enactment. In the fifties and sixties, admitting such thoughts aloud would have earned me a sermon on the role of holy women in the church. But that would not have solved my problem. The iconoclast in me, the Southern girl who would be pope, would have wondered as I wonder now: Suppose Catholic women announce one Friday that if a bishop doesn't want our daughters on the altar, we're just too worn out to argue. In fact, we are so tired we won't be able to do anything, and that includes phone calls, vestments, flowers, doughnuts, lectoring, cleaning, workshops, raffle tickets, teaching, singing in the choir, balancing the books, visiting the sick, or parish administration. We're not going on retreat—we're simply retreating.

But as a Christian, I cannot retreat. At home, day in and day out, I prepare meals for my family; I set and clear the table; I preside over my family's nourishment and pleasure. This simple service helps me approach the Paschal meal with, I think, fuller understanding. If, as Thomas Aquinas wrote, the purpose of the Eucharist is to celebrate Christ in anticipation of his kingdom, then we must consider carefully the implications of that kingdom. Must women be invisible there?

The gentle Jesus of the Gospels did not ask women to set up and clean up invisibly. He invited the Samaritan woman to serve him openly at the well. He opened his arms to outcasts, lepers, tax collectors, and women; he wants us to join hands around his table, without distinctions between Gentile or Jew, slave or free, woman or man. And since my bishop still disagrees, I wish he would come and explain why to my daughter himself.

BRIDGET BALTHROP MORTON

Bridget Balthrop Morton is a poet, free-lance writer, and mother of three. Her "Daniel: Beloved by God and by Me" appeared in Commonweal *(October 20, 1989).*

THE GONG SHOW

DANGER, BOYS AT WORK

DISGRACE UNDER PRESSURE

Once when I was eight or nine years old my mother and I went to Mass in a newly constructed church. Before the service started, the priest came out and asked if there was an altar boy present. I was volunteered.

In the sacristy, I found to my dismay that there were only two cassocks. One looked as if it were intended for a dignified midget, the other for someone who might play power forward for the Celtics. Perhaps because I was short and fat, the smaller one looked uncomfortably like a black tutu. I put on the larger.

By rolling up the sleeves and then gathering six inches or so of excess length in one hand, I managed with the other to get the candles lit and the altar prepared. Then, followed by a train that could have graced the court of Elizabeth, I led the celebrant out.

All went well until the priest finished reading the Epistle, on the right side of the altar, and moved to the center to pray. At this time his server was supposed to pick up the missal and its heavy stand, descend the three altar steps, turn, genuflect, and then mount to the other side, there to set the book on the altar so the priest could read the Gospel. (Recall, this all happened long before the Second Vatican Council. The altar had not yet been turned around. The celebrant still had his back to the congregation the whole time.)

The missal and stand were incredibly heavy. The only way I could manage when I picked them up was to lock my elbows at my sides and lean backward. Then I shuffled cautiously toward the top step, peering out of the corner of my eye even as I felt with my toe.

After a number of frantic taps, I found the edge. In order to be sure the cassock was out of the way, I began with several preparatory kicks. Then I wobbled down the steps, turned, and genuflected.

I think I knew even before I stood up that it was all over, but with a fatalism that would have done Hemingway credit, I played the cards as they had been dealt.

The first step was all right.

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As I placed my foot on the second, it was as if I suddenly had been clubbed on the back of the neck.

I was mounting the stairs inside the cassock. My chin was violently jerked to my chest and then to my knees. The heavy book and stand flew from my hands.

As I lay curled in fetal splendor on the top step of the altar, I was surrounded by a dull, gong-like reverberation. Only later did I realize that at the moment when I let fly with the missal and stand, the priest—a tall man—was still leaning over, his lips an inch or so away from the altar, whispering cabalistically to himself. The book took him just above the back of his knees, driving him forward with such force that the top of his head hit the tabernacle flush on.

I honestly have little memory of what happened after that. I only recall that the rest of Mass was occasionally punctuated by muffled screams of laughter from the congregation.

Being something of an introvert, I've brooded over this and kindred incidents, trying to suck some marrow of meaning from the hard bones of humiliation. I've reached a couple of conclusions. I respect dignified people. Especially in the church, I'm glad there are so many who are able to carry off the grand gesture.

But try as I may, dignity is not mine. Nor is it for those whom I know the best. I've finally decided that it is simply impossible not to play the fool, now and again. To be human is to be constantly at risk. Ludicrousness ever lurks near at hand. We can't escape. Laughter alone affirms our common humanity.

The other conclusion is more theological. If we are created in the image and likeness of God and if laughter is somehow the hallmark of genuine human intercourse, then so it must be for God as well. I'm glad we've been told of the Trinity; Aristotle's "thought of thought" would be singularly lonesome.

DONALD HAYNES

Donald Haynes, a cultural historian, educational consultant, and writer for dramatic television, lives in the cornfields of New Carlisle, Indiana.

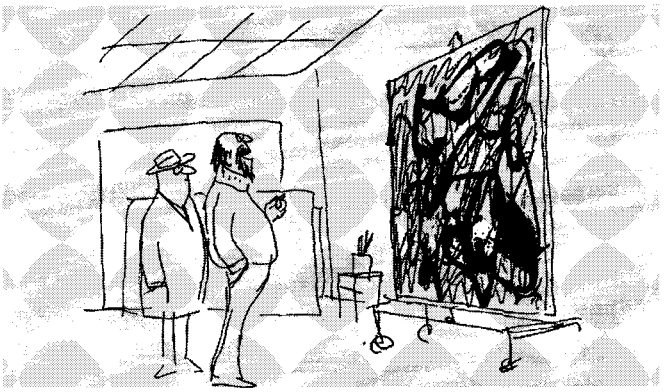
REPORT FROM VENEZUELA

THE HIGH COST OF GOLD

ANOTHER PART OF THE (RAIN) FOREST

While the devastation of the Brazilian Amazon has become a worldwide cause célèbre, little attention has as yet focused on the fate of the extensive rain forest in neighboring Venezuela. Without it, an ecological disaster is likely.

The culprit is gold. The same breed of gold miners who wreaked havoc in northern Brazil, both to the environment and its indigenous Indians, are now doing the same in Venezuela. Known as *garimpeiros*, tens of thousands of them (expelled last year from the Yanomami reservations in Brazil's state of Roraima) have arrived in Venezuela's Orinoco and Amazon River basins. They have been joined by an equal number of native Venezuelan miners, and by multinational interests.



"I call it 'Environment.'"

The majestic splendor of Venezuela's tropical forest belies its fragility. "The forest there is like a *paper tiger*," filmmaker and national Congressman Carlos Azpurua recently told me. "Given the erosion-prone quality of the soil, deforestation is practically an irreversible process, the end result of which is total barrenness."

In recent years, gold miners began using high-powered pumps connected to suction hoses which spray water from nearby rivers, removing vast amounts of soil in areas which were formerly covered by trees and other forms of vegetation. With time, the pits created become mud holes which serve as breeding grounds for malaria-infested mosquitoes.

An even greater hazard to public health has been the extensive utilization of mercury in the gold amalgamation process. Significant quantities of mercury have been detected near the confluence of the Orinoco and its main tributary, the Caroni River, in the vicinity of beaches and water taps which serve the inhabitants of Puerto Ordaz, the region's largest city. Unsafe levels of mercury, up to 3.414 micrograms per kilo, have been detected in the livers of several species of commonly consumed fish, although the contamination content in their muscles is still considered below the danger level.

Of equal concern is the sedimentation caused by soil erosion which threatens to clog up the turbines and other equipment of the Caroni's Guri Dam, the nation's main source of hydroelectric power. The prospect is forcing the government to reconsider its plans for expanding the complex.

While the gravity of the ecological damage that is being done is widely recognized here, no single criterion exists regarding corrective steps. The government's "ecological decrees" last July were hailed as a definitive solution. Their enactment proscribed the use of mercury in the amalgamation of alluvial gold in the open air and called for government-supervised refinement. Given the large number of foreign and Venezuelan miners who operate without legal authorization, however, optimism regarding enforcement of the measure may be wishful thinking.

One partial solution has been the beefing up of Venezuelan presence in the border area to check the entry of *garimpeiros* from Brazil. Some Catholic missionaries see their presence in

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the area as a contribution in this regard. Capuchin Father Jesus de la Torre, who toured his order's mission east of the Caroni in September, noted that "the *garimpeiros* thrive on the neglect of the government in the region, which has been converted into a veritable 'no-man's land.'" Azpurua and others suggest that nothing short of the complete elimination of gold mining—both legal and illegal—in most of the region will spare it from desolation. "Even if suction pumps are replaced by the 'safer' technique of bulldozing, the tenuous organic substance of the soil will still be broken up." According to Azpurua, techniques that have been successfully employed in other parts of the world fail to grasp the Amazon's uniqueness; the only truly "safe" method is the traditional artisan practice of panning, which few miners are willing to revert to. Azpurua and others call for miniprojects—small-scale tourism, the construction of small hydroelectric dams, and the collection of medicinal herbs—as viable and acceptable alternatives to help sustain the region's population.

An even more extreme position is embraced by Alexander Luzardo, a leading conservationist and former congressman, who is wary of all activity in the region which promotes population concentration, even "ecotourism." Luzardo points to a study of the Venezuelan territory of Amazonas, undertaken by the Ministry of the Environment, which recommends limiting the area's population to two inhabitants per square kilometer. In an interview in September, Luzardo told me "the system of national parks is designed to protect nature, not to facilitate the arrival of outsiders." He went on to point out that the practice of Yanomami tribes of dividing up once their membership exceeds a certain number is testimony to their sense that nature can support only a limited population density in the region.

Luzardo argues that the Amazonian nations by themselves are not in a position to deal with the full array of ecological problems in the region, and that assistance from the developed nations is imperative. Such help—which should go beyond the limited success of the "debt-for-nature swaps" in which third-world debts are condoned—is the responsibility of all nations because of the global implications of the area's ecology. Luzardo, who is a member of the advisory commission for the Amazonian conference to be held in Brazil in July 1992, has advocated a "World Agreement for the Protection of the Amazon." The plan envisions the creation of a commission whose financial resources would be derived largely from the developed nations. The Amazonian nations would constitute 50 percent of the voting power.This representational balance was designed to calm South American fears that the "internationalization of the Amazon" would infringe upon national sovereignty. The developed nations would contribute in other ways as well: Japan, for instance, which imports wood from the Amazon, and Germany, which exports mercury, would commit themselves to taking effective measures to control this type of commerce. Governments would also monitor the investments of multinational corporations.

One possible contribution of the technologically advanced nations which Luzardo failed to mention would be to determine whether any ecologically safe means of mining compatible with the region are available.

One key cabinet member who has promoted gold mining concessions with Mitsubishi and other foreign interests claims that large capital is more *ecologically conscious* and uses more sophisticated equipment which is less damaging than that employed by small miners.

Still to be answered, however, is the costliness of environmental neglect itself. It is possible in the last analysis that thousands of mining jobs and the potential increase to the nation's gold reserves will have to be sacrificed because the other tradeoffs are too high. Protecting the nation's water and energy supply, its forest reserves, and freshwater fish, not to mention the global repercussions, cannot be denied and will have to come before all other considerations. STEVE ELLNER

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OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET

THOMAS v. ROE

The Anita Hill vs. Clarence Thomas slugfest of mid-October is the first installment of the *Roe* v. *Wade* slugfest that will take place if the U.S. Supreme Court reverses that landmark abortion decision—a reversal made all the more likely by the elevation of Thomas to the Court.

During his confirmation hearings, of course, Thomas denied that he had made up his mind on *Roe*. But nobody believed him: not his enemies and not his friends. Everyone is convinced he is anti-*Roe* and that his vote on the Court will either create an anti-*Roe* majority or, more likely, add to one that already exists. His implausible profession of open-mindedness on *Roe* did nothing to help his credibility when he later denied Anita Hill's charges.

I don't know about you, but when I watch TV it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to tell whether I am seeing the network news or "A Current Affair." The year began with Teddy Kennedy's nephew; it advanced to Senator Robb and the beauty queen (plus a little coke); it ended with Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill. The common denominators are sex and the U.S. Senate. Mixing the two has lowered the prestige of both. They say that all this scandal has caused people to get turned off to politics. I wonder if it has soured them on sex as well. At all events, I think Dan Quayle should resign and allow Oprah to become president of the Senate.

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"It's a compromise, senator—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays we're prochoice...Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays we're prolife."

The Thomas nomination was opposed by a number of interest groups, including the leadership of many prominent black organizations (e.g., the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, the National Baptists). But the most intense opposition came from the prochoice lobby. It is the abortion/choice issue that made the nomination process such an emotionally charged affair. If there were no abortion issue dividing the country, Thomas would have been confirmed by a lopsided majority, and Anita Hill would never have been forced into the national limelight.

For that matter, absent the abortion issue there would have been no Thomas nomination. After all, he was not nominated because he was the most qualified person in America, as George Bush would have us believe. He was named because he was a prolifer who has two attributes likely to get him through an essentially prochoice Senate: (a) he is an African-American, which made it difficult for Deep South Democrats to vote against him; and (b) he is no legal scholar and therefore (unlike Robert Bork) has left no paper trail of embarrassing legal theories.

If you enjoyed the Hill-Thomas bloodletting, then you are in for a real treat once *Roe* is overturned and the abortion question moves front and center in all fifty states. You ain't seen nothin' yet. In very liberal states candidates will vie with one another to see who can give the most extreme expression of the prochoice faith; in very conservative states there will be competition among extreme expressions of the prolife faith; and in both states the heterodox will find it nearly impossible to win political office. In moderate states there will be virtually no moderation, as the two parties attempt to tear one another apart. Everywhere the nation will lose its balance and swing dangerously in the direction of single-issue politics. Increasingly the best will lack all conviction and the worst will be full of passionate intensity.

At any rate, this will be the scenario if the abortion struggle remains in the hands of the two parties currently in the field. Prochoice extremists are satisfied with nothing other than abortion-on-demand. Anything less they consider a violation of liberties as sacred as freedom of speech, press, and religion. Prolife extremists are equally radical in their views, though with the signs changed. They see abortion as a violation of the most fundamental of all human rights, namely, the right to life.

The cow will jump over the moon before these two extreme parties will compromise. They are both sincere; they are both idealistic; they are both absolutists. They can no more compromise than could the slaveholders and the abolitionists. If the expanded abortion controversy is reduced to a battle between these two parties, American society will be torn to pieces.

In this great controversy there are three sets of rights to be considered: the right of the woman to choose, the right of the unborn to live, and the right of the nation to live in peace. The first two have their dedicated and eloquent advocates. Up till now the third has had little or no representation.

This nation has no greater need at the moment than that a party of moderation step forward to take the lead on the choice/abortion question. Up till now the silent majority, with mixed feelings on abortion, has stood quietly aside and watched prochoice and prolife extremists battle it out, meanwhile hoping that the whole issue would somehow fade away. But plainly it will not fade away. On the contrary, it will grow bigger than ever once it enters the post-*Roe* era.

The alternatives are clear: either the silent majority will assert itself under the leadership of moderates and find an abortion compromise; or the United States will become the scene of a long and nasty battle, where ignorant armies clash by night. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

THE CAN-DO QUONSET

HOUSING IN A HURRY

I discovered this year that I am a Quonset person—someone who at one time lived in a Quonset hut, the nation's answer fifty years ago to the need for housing in a hurry. Quonset persons were so dubbed by Christopher Reynolds, a *Los Angeles Times* writer who thought that the fiftieth anniversary of the Quonset should be celebrated somehow.

And indeed it should have been if only to remind us that this country was once able to answer a pressing need for shelter (for its soldiers here and abroad) by designing a "portable, durable, adaptable" building within three months in 1941, according to Reynolds. Within the next five years the Navy alone—(the Army used them, too)—made or bought 160,000 Quonsets. They were also able to get them to the places they were needed: Africa, the South Pacific, Newfoundland, the Philippines,

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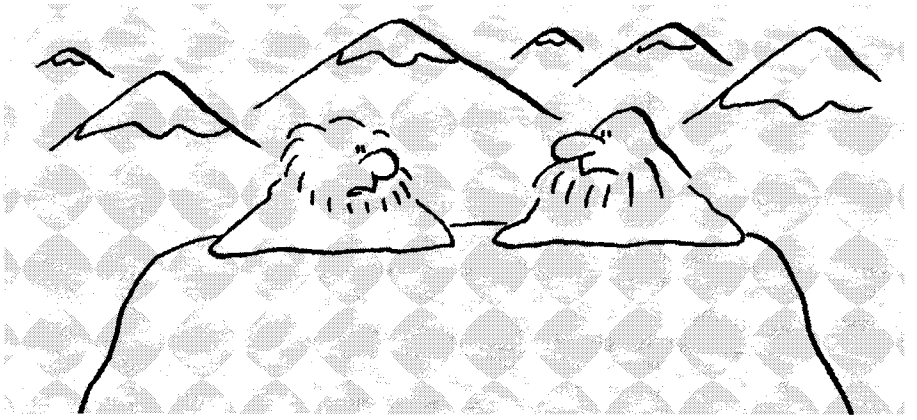

"I know a house is out of the question, but how about just a little patio with maybe a couple of lawn chairs?"

northern Europe during the war. By 1946 Quonsets were being shipped all over the United States in answer to a second need, housing for thousands of returning veterans and their families.

It was then that I became a Quonset person. The college where my husband was to teach was flooded, like colleges and universities nationwide, with returning veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill. These were older students, many of them married. They needed housing as did the new faculty members added to accommodate them. So the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, found room on campus for a "village" of three streets of the army-issue prefabricated corrugated-steel housing units, each with two two-bedroom-and-bath apartments. We were among the first to move in.

Actually ours were not true Quonsets. The Quonset hut, for those readers too young to know and those who may have forgotten, was an arched, rounded structure with straight walls only at the two ends. The arch was, according to Quonset enthusiasts, a positive feature which enabled the hut to withstand high winds and earthquakes. (It was also architecturally pleasing for those who valued modernism. Reynolds notes that an architect built a Quonset church in California and that artist Robert Motherwell commissioned a steel and glass Quonset for himself on Long Island.)

Our hut, although usually referred to as a Quonset, had straight walls and a pitched roof and was prefabricated of corrugated steel panels bolted together as in the Quonset. Like the Quonset it was set on a concrete slab and had Masonite walls. Unlike the Quonset it had windows and a door in the side walls. We were told that our huts had been barracks for Army officers. I think having lived there qualifies me as a Quonset person.

What was it like living there? Not at all bad. We were young and very glad to have housing in a city where there were precious few apartments or houses available to young people on small salaries. We tackled the insufficiencies with enthusiasm. The first room was a largish living room-kitchen with a big oil space heater to one side. When we balanced the space heater with a hutch-like cupboard turned to face the kitchen we had added wall space and divided the living space from the kitchen. We were quite pleased with the resulting small living room furnished with our inherited chintz-covered sofa and easy chair, and the dining-library space with its mahogany drop leaf table and small accompanying chairs.

There was a short hall to the bedrooms. Off it there was a small bath with a cubical steel shower stall. (We learned to warm up that shower with hot water before stepping into it.) Next to it was a space for a water heater and a clothes closet. One bedroom was good-sized. The other, smaller, we made a study-cum-guest room with a sleep sofa, a desk, and some bookcases. At first our hut seemed pleasantly adequate for two people and our large springer spaniel. We enjoyed our neighbors, had people to dinner and sherry parties, and a lot of drop-in visitors from the campus and from the neighboring college where I was still teaching.

But the hut did begin to seem crowded when our first daughter was born and we had to find places for all the paraphernalia that comes with a baby—bassinet (later a crib), bathinette (the changing table of that era), highchair, play pen, etc., etc. Then, too, although the "Tom-Town" huts had been insulated for their previous purpose in places like Newfoundland and northern Europe, the insulation didn't seem quite adequate for subzero Minnesota winters and continental summers. In winter we woke to walls studded with frost on the nail holes. In summer we sweltered.

A Californian still living in a hut, still a Quonset person, is quoted as saying that when the weather changes, "the hut tends to ping and pop a lot, like a motor when it's cooling down." I don't remember pinging and popping but I do remember the groaning of steel in cold winter nights.

There are still Quonset huts in use everywhere across the country. Reynolds lists churches, banks, theaters, offices, barns, schools, homes, bowling alleys. The full story of the Quonset as an architectural and building phenomenon is left untold, although Rhode Island has added a batch of seventeen first-generation Quonsets to the National Register of historic places and two models are kept intact at the Naval Construction Battalion Museum in Port Hueneme, California. However, architectural historian David Gephard, who teaches at the University of California at Santa Barbara, is quoted as saying "it is a fascinating tale." He hopes to find a graduate student interested enough to pursue it.

As a former Quonset person I think the most important part of Quonset history is its evidence of what this nation can achieve in the field of housing if we organize our resources. National Building Museum curator David Chase has called it "a fabulous example of American ingenuity and can-do spirit and productive power." Cities and counties throughout the land are struggling with the problem of the homeless—not only of derelicts but of families living in temporary shelters, in the streets, and in cars. When will we muster the will, form the coalitions of industry and labor and government, and find the land to replicate a housing miracle like the Quonset and house the homeless as I was once housed?

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SEXTON'S LAST TAPES

BREAKING THE SEAL OF THE THERAPIST'S CODE

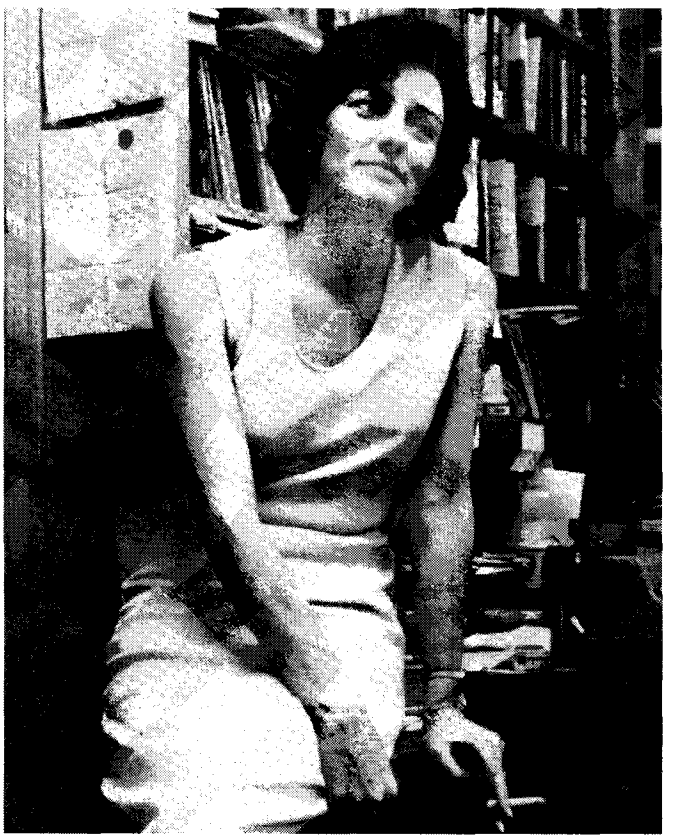
JAMES F. KEENAN

A biography of the poet Anne Sexton has been published with all of the notoriety and penchant for self-exposure that seems to have characterized much of her life, which she ended, a suicide, in 1974 (*Anne Sexton: A Biography*, by Diane Wood Middlebrook, Houghton Mifflin, 488 pp., $24.95). The controversy has swirled around the release of her complete psychotherapy record including more than 300 audiotapes by Martin Orne, one of Sexton's psychiatrists. Orne gave the record to the biographer with the agreement of Sexton's daughter who is also her literary executor. Sexton seems never to have left instructions about the tapes (*New York Times*, July 15, 1991).

It was during Sexton's eight-year therapy with Orne that she first began writing poetry. In releasing her record, Orne is reported in the *Times* story to have been motivated by a desire to show that troubled people, like Sexton, could be helped by therapy to overcome their mental and emotional conditions, and even become productive and successful people. Although release of the tapes violated Sexton's privacy and breached doctor-patient confidentiality, Orne says that Sexton "would have jumped at the opportunity to share what we did." He seems to have concluded that she would have agreed to the tapes' release, particularly because of the possible benefits to others. Sexton's daughter and friends raised no objection to Orne's release of the tapes to Middlebrook; some even said the poet would have approved. But his fellow psychiatrists strongly objected. Should he have done it?

Orne's own consequentialist rationale—that the record of Sexton's therapy might encourage others to seek psychiatric help—can easily be argued the other way. His release of the tapes may put in jeopardy the confidentiality that patients expect from their psychiatrists. Considering the degree of difficulty many patients have in confiding their deepest fears and expectations to a therapist or even in beginning treatment because of an inability to trust others, this counterargument seems all the weightier. It is possible that by releasing the records, Orne may have made the prospect of troubled people seeking therapy less, rather than more, likely. Orne could, of course, press his case further: Since he believes Sexton would have concurred in the release, he could say that he did not breach confidentiality so much as presume that she implicitly suspended him from that obligation. He could go on to argue that no psychiatrist should ever release any records unless he or she had a reasonable expectation that unavailable former patients would grant the release. Under such circumstances, the therapist could conclude that patients' fears of betrayal would be significantly diminished.

Though we might accept Orne's reasoning, we must still ask whether his whole argument is correct. Does Sexton have the right to release her psychiatrist from his obligation to maintain



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confidentiality, which she—and all patients—have as a legitimate expectation? Most readers will probably share the supposition that Orne's actions are right or wrong according to whether they think Sexton would have granted the release. But is this supposition correct? Please note that the question is not whether Sexton could release her own account of the therapy sessions. She could; indeed, many patients have. What is new in this case is the transaction from Orne to Middlebrook; it was the psychiatrist, not the patient, who released the records. Thus the question is whether Sexton could give her psychiatrist the right to release the account of her therapy for the sake of a biography.

Before answering this question, there are two fundamental moral considerations. The first is that general rules apply generally, and the second, related one, is what counts as a legitimate exception to general rules.

In the case at hand, the general rule that a psychiatrist not breach patient confidences is strong, but not absolute; for example, when a patient is a clear and present danger to him- or herself or to another person. Here the psychiatrist's judgment must be finely balanced, taking into consideration the dangers of violating confidentiality and the impact of treating a patient in a paternalistic fashion over against the urgency that someone's life is endangered.

Such a scenario received considerable attention in a case where the California Supreme Court ruled that a psychiatrist whose patient confided his intention to kill his girlfriend had an obligation to inform the potential victim. The majority opinion in that case, though recognizing the importance of the patient's privacy and the confidential nature of psychotherapeutic treatment, argued in favor of the "public interest in safety from violent assault." The dissenting opinion highlighted the singular importance of confidentiality: "First, without substantial assurance of confidentiality, those requiring treatment will be deterred from seeking assistance....Second, the guarantee of confidentiality is essential in eliciting the full disclosure necessary for effective treatment....Third, even if the patient fully discloses his thought, assurance that the confidential relationship will not be breached is necessary to maintain his trust in the psychiatrist—the very means by which treatment is effected" (*Tarasoff* v. *Regents of the University of California*).

While the court's decisive exception to the general rule shows that the rule does not hold absolutely, more to the point of this essay, it shows that the rule almost always does hold. The exception being made in the *Tarasoff* case, where the patient actually carried out his threat and killed his girlfriend, is that a psychiatrist must take steps to protect an endangered life even at the cost of breaching patient confidentiality. That there was debate over the issue even in such an extreme case only underscores the great reluctance we have as a society in releasing a psychiatrist from this critical obligation to maintain confidentiality.

This brings us to the second moral consideration. The late Paul Ramsey in a widely cited article, "The Case of the Curious Exception," showed that an exception to any general rule requires that the exception itself be justified by and be subject to another rule. Thus an exception to a rule is really the case of another more urgent rule taking precedence. In the Tarasoff case, the psychiatrist is not so much exempted from the rule of confidentiality as he is obliged to follow the still more important rule that requires he protect an endangered life.

In the case of Orne and Sexton, there would be no need for a more urgent rule if Orne's obligation of confidentiality could be suspended by Sexton's consent, or, as he seemed to argue, her implicit consent. His suspension of the rule would be valid if his obligation rests only on her individual right to confidentiality. If he is obliged because she made confidentiality a condition of her therapy, then he is free of that obligation if she changes that condition. Of course there is some truth in the fact that the confidentiality of their sessions rested with Sexton, because she was always free to discuss her therapy with anyone. But is it simply Sexton's right to confidentiality that binds Orne to his obligation?

In fact, Orne's obligation to preserve confidentiality exists not because Sexton or any individual has a right to it. Orne's obligation, I believe, precedes Sexton's right: the obligation existed before she—or any patient—ever entered his office. Orne maintains confidentiality not because he is Sexton's psychiatrist, but because he is a registered psychiatrist. His obligation is not based on the decision of any patient, but rather on the social nature of his profession. His role in the community as a psychiatrist is recognized by a degree from an academic institution, induction into a society of peers, and a license granted by the state where he practices. By accepting these recognitions of his training and skills, he also accepts responsibilities, obligations, and duties, which are not private, but public. Thus, the law recognizes that a psychiatrist, like a priest, but unlike a friend, enjoys "privileged communication." So it is that the courts, as in the Tarasoff case, must adjudicate the fine line between an obligation to a patient and an obligation to society, in that case the endangered girlfriend; and so it is, that medical societies require their members to maintain the confidentiality of every patient's record, "even after the patient has died," as the World Medical Association did in 1968. For much the same reasons, the psychiatrist's breach of confidence is qualitatively different from a friend's breach. The friend's betrayal of a secret or a confidence is a private matter and reflects on the individual, not on his or her profession. On the other hand, the psychiatrist's action is public; because his profession is thoroughly institutional, the rightness or wrongness of his actions should be judged under public, institutional norms.

A patient—Anne Sexton among them—does not, therefore, possess the authority to free the therapist from confidentiality as a simple matter of course (nor does her daughter, or any other relative or friend). Only more urgent rules, related to a psychiatrist's other responsibilities, could override the responsibility to maintain a confidence. This does not mean that the decision to follow a more urgent rule should normally be made without the patient's consent (obviously in a case like Tarasoff, the court's ruling would require the psychiatrist to act whether he had the patient's consent or not); only that, generally speaking, while the patient's authorization is necessary, it alone is not sufficient justification for releasing a

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therapist from confidentiality.

In fact, a patient's authorization is required not because an individual patient claims it, but because the community, through the institution of psychiatry, has established that authorization as ethically mandatory. So, for example, a psychiatrist might break a confidence when a patient wants to get a job and asks the therapist to certify that he or she is capable of assuming, or reassuming, a position. But even here it is the psychiatrist's judgment about the patient's condition and not a record of the therapy that is being requested. Other instances where a psychiatrist would be asked by the patient to breach confidentiality might include civil procedures, such as divorce or child custody, or criminal cases where the defendant petitions the psychiatrist to testify on the defendant's own behalf.

All of these exceptions to the general rule of confidentiality have certain common points: the patient's initiative, a matter of urgency, and testimony or judgments that have a direct bearing on the patient's own interests. Independently these three common points are not sufficient grounds for breaking confidentialy; only together do they serve as the conditions where an emerging rule could override the general obligation to maintain confidentiality.

Quite clearly, Dr. Orne's release of Anne Sexton's records to her biographer is a dramatic departure from ethical norms and the exceptions permitted by the law and professional practice. Certainly his decision to release virtually the entire history of Sexton's eight-year treatment, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of his clinical methods, does not constitute a serious or urgent reason. And though Sexton is dead and cannot be harmed from the breach of confidentiality, her name and reputation may be. Certainly others may be harmed. That Sexton's daughter found much of the material (some of which concerns herself) "extremely painful," as one supposes others may as well, makes clear how little benefit there is likely to be in this transaction.

Reviewing the biography in the *New York Times* (August 13), Michiko Kakutani offers substantial evidence from the biography itself that Anne Sexton may have cared far more for her privacy than her daughter, friends, and colleagues think. But apart from her views on the matter, the central issue remains: Every breach of patient confidences affects the profession of psychiatry and the entire community. Orne's action victimizes not only Sexton, but the practice of psychiatry as well as current and future psychiatric patients who rightly expect that theirs is a privileged communication, breached only under certain specific conditions over which they largely have control. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Orne's unilateral decision has caused unnecessary and unjustifiable harm.

DEAD, BUT STILL WITH US

BARTHELME'S FADING CATHOLIC INTUITIONS

PAUL GILES

Despite being brought up Roman Catholic and attending parochial schools, Donald Barthelme clearly cannot be thought of as a religious writer in any orthodox sense. Unlike writers such as Flannery O'Connor or his friend Walker Percy, Barthelme, who died in 1989, had almost nothing to say about his childhood religion or its influence upon his subsequent work. It is evident enough as well that Barthelme's texts do not subscribe, either explicitly or implicitly, to Catholicism as an accredited system of belief. Nevertheless, the philosophical and theological paradoxes in Barthelme's works demonstrate a fascinating example of the Catholic literary sensibility at work. Despite his avowed agnosticism, Barthelme in fact shares at least as many conceptual characteristics with the avowed believer Walker Percy as he does with his more obvious generic companions, postmodernist fabulators such as John Barth or Robert Coover or Thomas Pynchon.

In his fiction Barthelme prefers fragments rather than linear narratives, collage rather than thematic sequence, irony rather than direct statement. His is a world of "epistemological skepticism," as the critic Larry McCaffrey put it, where authority in all its forms—fathers, priests, psychoanalysts—has been overturned, with the result that the authority of the text itself is also necessarily thrown into disarray. "God was the omniscient author, but he died," Ronald Sukenick famously claimed in his story "The Death of the Novel": Authors can no longer manipulate their characters in imitation of a divine will, since divine will has absconded, leaving the earthlings grappling with metaphysical and textual confusion. These are familiar arguments, and in their own way they are true enough. But while Barthelme can be interpreted synchronically, in terms of the postmodernist culture of his time, he can also be interpreted historically through the perspective of a Catholic cultural tradition of radical antihu-

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manism going back through Percy, Flannery O'Connor, even as far as James T. Farrell.

Barthelme's version of a fragmented "city life" is in fact not altogether dissimilar from Farrell's: In both cases we find fictional "heroes" marginalized by a corporate and ritualistic culture which becomes the dominating presence within the text and which frustrates the attempts of any individual to manipulate or even understand it. The romantic or transcendental ego is sidelined, and some kind of "system," whose very inscrutability constitutes its intimidating power, seems to be in control. Ironically, the traditional complaints about Farrell and Dreiser—about how they lack romantic imagination and possess an un-American sense of passive fatalism which compels them to reproduce their environment as a *fait accompli* rather than striving to construct a new "world elsewhere"—recur in criticism of Barthelme. Indeed, Alfred Kazin relegated Barthelme to the status of a minor "antinovelist": "the almighty state is always in view," Kazin has written. "So Barthelme sentences us to the complicity with the system that he suffers from more than anyone....He is under the terrible discipline that the system inflicts on those who are most fascinated with its relentlessness." What is interesting here is the way Kazin's polemic—"almighty state," "system," "terrible discipline"—contains a strange echo of the populist anti-Catholic rhetoric of Paul Blanshard and his followers in the late 1940s, with their complaints about the relentless and dehumanizing systems enforced by Rome. Of course, Kazin's critique is not consciously anti-Catholic. But it helps reveal that his allegiance to D. H. Lawrence's ideology of the novel as an emblem of the vital individual flame, a "bright book of life," is itself a culturally partial and not an impartial idea.

In this sense, Catholicism for Barthelme operates in the paradoxical condition of *The Dead Father*: "Dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead." Just as the figures in this 1975 novel make their confessions to the Dead Father despite the old man's defunct state, so Barthelme's texts seek an accommodation with the religion their author apparently no longer believes in. Throughout his career, though, Barthelme made various statements about his work which subvert the familiar image of him as simply a ludic and lexical prankster. He told one interviewer that he especially respected Mallarmé because the French poet "shakes words loose from their attachments and bestows new meanings upon them, meanings which point not toward the external world, but toward the Absolute, acts of poetic intuition." He re-echoed this aspiration toward the "Absolute" in a 1976 symposium on fiction with Grace Paley, Walker Percy, and William Gass. "I would suggest," said Barthelme,

> that there is a realm of possible knowledge which can be reached by artists, which is not susceptible of mathematical verification but which is true. This is sometimes spoken of as the ineffable. If there is any word I detest in the language, this would be it, but the fact that it exists, the word ineffable, is suspicious in that it suggests that there might be something that is ineffable. And I believe that's the place artists are trying to get to, and I further believe that when they are successful, they reach it; my painter friend, for example, reaches an area somewhere probably between mathematics and religion, in which what may fairly be called truth exists.

This interesting area "somewhere probably between mathematics and religion" need not necessarily signify any benign divinity, of course: one thinks of the dark neoplatonism of Samuel Beckett, where the austere rationalism of Cartesian "truth" dwarfs the squalid contingencies of worldly existence without offering to redeem human life in any way. In February 1989, a few months before they both died, Barthelme acknowledged Beckett to be an oedipal "problem" for him because of what he called the "enormous strength of his style, his tone."

Nevertheless, the idea of this quest for something "ineffable" helps to elucidate what many critics of Barthelme's fiction have felt, that his work does not simply celebrate anarchy but strives to put it in another perspective.

Images from Catholic liturgy and traditions pop up in all kinds of unexpected places within Barthelme's stories. In "Critique de la Vie Quotidienne," Wanda rebukes her husband with "a look upon her face corresponding to that which St. Catherine of Siena bent upon Pope Gregory whilst reproaching him for the luxury of Avignon." In "The Genius," a man inspecting a church "because the nave is said to be a particularly fine example of Burgundian gothic" becomes deeply intimidated by the icy stare of a nun. In "Departures," a "friendly Franciscan" enters "in his brown robes" to inquire why the narrator entered "None" in the space for "Religion" on his hospital form. At the end of "The Rise of Capitalism," we find assorted saints come marching in to deliver their "same old message" about placing hope "in the word of God." All of these examples come from Barthelme's 1972 collection *Sadness*, and the sadness in question here betokens a world of loss, a world where metaphysical presence has been promised but then denied. The random quality of these images, the way they are scattered throughout the texts without being subordinated to any kind of pattern of logical exegesis, suggests how Barthelme's Catholicism is no philosophical system

Paul Giles's critical essay on Donald Barthelme is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's works, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of Donald Barthelme have to tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? The most recently published article in the series was written by David Toolan on Pat Conroy (February 22, 1991).

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but a lurking irrational shadow which seems to undermine the positivistic premises of quotidian life.

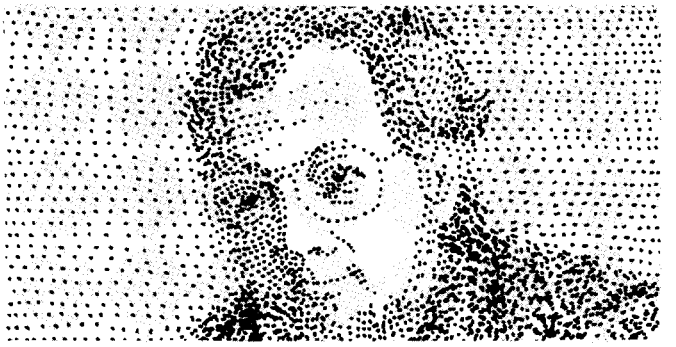
In "On the Steps of the Conservatory," from *Great Days* (1979), one student asks another: "When are you going to change yourself, change yourself into a loaf or a fish?" There is no response to the miraculous suggestion. "Christian imagery is taught at the conservatory," so we are told, along with "Islamic imagery and the imagery of Public Safety," but this kind of bathetic and flattening explanation cannot cancel the aura of suggestiveness that Barthelme's religious references bring forth. While his texts offer no metaphysical formulas, their unexplained dimension works to subvert any movement toward closure from within the comfortable middle-class environment which they describe. For Barthelme, religion itself may not be an answer, but it disallows the validity of any other possible explanation of the world.

While nearly all of Barthelme's religious references tend to be comic, indeed hilarious, they depend for that comedy upon recognition of an incongruity between their worldly and putatively "spiritual" frames of reference. One of the clearest examples of such incongruity is the monk in "Lightning" who feels that deprivation of rock music is the big drawback to a monastic career; he avows it would not be so bad to "retire to one's cell at night to read St. Augustine" if one could simultaneously listen to Rod Stewart and the B-52's.

Barthelme, however, extends this incongruity beyond simple comedy to produce an implicit critique of the more rigid and literal aspects of Catholic theology. In "The New Music," for instance, the narrator wonders "Could Christ have performed the work of the Redemption had he come into the world in the shape of a pea?" In his 1986 novel, *Paradise*, Simon similarly asks himself whether Christ had to "visit each and every planet" in the solar system that supports life and "go through the same routine, the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion, and so on." The point is not that these are nonsensical questions but that they appear, on the contrary, both logical and pertinent, and are in fact just the kind of issue with which old-fashioned scholastic theologians used to concern themselves.

The early story "Florence Green Is 81" recalls the fourth-grade classroom at Our Lady of the Sorrows, where Sister Scholastica "knew how many angels could dance on the head of a pin." Hence by taking the literalist tendencies of traditional Catholic theology to their logical conclusion, Barthelme reduces them to absurdity. "Is there bluegrass in heaven? Make enquiries," the narrator of "The New Music" tells himself. Sister Scholastica would presumably know the answer. There is an equation to be made here between Barthelme's subversion of Catholic scholastic theology and his subversion of the traditional realistic novel. Both forms envision the world in an excessively literal way, ignoring those inconsistencies and absurdities which are inherent within each system. Barthelme parodies these systems by his technique of taking their premises to a ludicrous, though not illogical, conclusion.

Yet this parody does not constitute a didactic satire upon religious belief. What we find instead is a comedy of metaphysical displacement, where the fracture of worldly and otherwordly systems leaves Barthelme's heroes, like those of Walker Percy,



with a sense of being alienated wayfarers, searching for something "ineffable" but intangible. This, indeed, is the "new principle" which the angels look for after the death of God (in the story "On Angels"); it is the same "new principle" for which the characters in *Snow White* seek. The idea that what these people have is "not enough" echoes around both these texts, though of course the quest for epistemological meaning itself is spoofed, no less than the literalist fallacies of the *Dictionary of Angels* and the Walt Disney legends. Similarly, in the Beckett-like story "The Leap," two unnamed individuals talk about the possibility of making a leap of faith but then decide, all things considered, to put it off until another time. It is the black comedy of hesitation and doubt, where belief seems impossible, yet every secular affair reverberates with the tantalizing possibility of metaphysical significance.

There is a similarly tantalizing oscillation between presence and absence in those lists and catalogues which throng Barthelme's pages, in parody, as Jerome Klinkowitz has written, of the litanies and catechisms characteristic of Catholic dogma. This debt is made explicit in the story "The Catechist," and also in "The Indian Uprising" where "Miss R" says "The only form of discourse of which I approve...is the litany." Barthelme's lists, like the Vatican's, are always straining toward completeness and finitude, but because his texts simultaneously deny that possibility of closure the lists also come to evoke a "terror of failure, loss, and disintegration," as the critic Regis Durand put it. Nevertheless, it is these glimpses of an ideal order which induce Barthelme's texts to reject Ronald Sukenick's model of an opaque, self-sufficient, and "purely aesthetic surface," and to strive instead for something intangible and unverifiable. As "Over the Sea of Hesitation" (1972) puts it:

> Wittgenstein was I think wrong when he said that about that which we do not know, we should not speak. He closed by fiat a great amusement park, there. Nothing gives me more pleasure than speaking about that which I do not know. I am not sure whether my ideas about various matters are correct or incorrect, but speak about them I must.

Quite the reverse in spirit from the minimalism and skepticism with which Barthelme is too often charged, this speculative tendency seeks some glimmer of "truth"—the "ineffable," as Barthelme himself put it—which might manifest itself when more obtuse worldly matters wither away. Writing of Barthelme, Alan Wilde called this a philosophy of "assent," an existential

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quest to discover not some essential truth, nor a modernist realm of order and the "aironic," but rather Heidegger's category of *Dasein*, "the contingency of being-in-the-world." Instead of attempting to flee into a nostalgic realm of symbolic order or romantic escapism, contended Wilde, Barthelme seeks to work through the ironies and contingencies of city life to reveal, in a "sacramental" way, "the extraordinary...amidst the quotidian."

This line of approach has some validity, and in many ways Barthelme's work fulfils that familiar mock-heroic dualism whereby the secular is sanctified at the same time as the sacred is secularized. It is important to stress, however, how Barthelme's is a specifically Catholic version of phenomenology: Barthelme's existential idiom is framed by a Catholic eschatology. In the story "Margins," Carl asks Edward: "Have you read *The Mystery of Being*, by Gabriel Marcel? I really liked that one. I thought that one was fine." Marcel's emphasis on the essentially circumscribed nature of bodily incarnation worked its way subliminally into many of Barthelme's fictions. Crucially, this is a metaphysic of human limitation rather than human transcendence. Like Marcel, Barthelme prioritizes *es denkt in mir* over *cogito ergo sum*: his characters cannot rationally understand truth, but they can—perhaps—irrationally embody it. These ontological limitations of the human condition are stressed once again in the quotation from Pascal advanced in "A Shower of Gold": "The natural misfortune of our mortal and feeble condition is so wretched that when we consider it closely, nothing can console us."

There are, in fact, many interesting links between Pascal and Barthelme. Both disdained the scholastic attempt to turn Catholic philosophy into dogma and concrete fact; both suggested instead that the "ineffable" was a question of hints, guesses, and wagers; both placed emphasis upon the limitations of the human domain. Pascal's famous assertion that it is man's misfortune not to be able to sit in a single room all his life is oddly mirrored in the geographically-constricted world of Barthelme's stories, where, one feels, some of the characters may have taken Pascal's advice to heart.

One such character is Simon, the architect in Barthelme's novel *Paradise*, who finds himself cooped up in his Manhattan apartment with three lingerie models. The point about this paradise is that it is a distinctively earthly, materialist phenomenon, a "hog heaven" dependent upon the bounties of money and sex. It is certainly not a divine resting-place, nor is it the kind of terrestrial utopia which Emerson or Thoreau would have favored; Simon keeps his money in a book entitled *On Adam's House*, as if to emphasize how his version of bliss diverges sharply from that of the "American Adam" in its more traditional pastoral paradigms.

As in Walker Percy's novels, we see a movement in Barthelme toward immanence rather than transcendence: for a Catholic sensibility, vulgar materialism can be philosophically more satisfactory than the self-deceptions of human heroism or romantic idealism, what the Jesuit critic William F. Lynch referred to disparagingly as univocalism or "angelism." Meditating upon the history of his profession, Barthelme's hero, Simon, shakes his head sadly over the folly of Le Corbusier's modernist ambitions, "the messianic-maniacal idea that architecture will make people better, civilize them." This is an idea presaged in *Snow White*, where one of the dwarfs ironically contemplates how "Clean buildings fill your eyes with sunlight, and your heart with the idea that man is perfectible." It is true, then, that Simon's paradisiacal idyll is a vulgar concept—"unearned," as he himself recognized—but in its very lack of pretentiousness it parodies those millennial apocalypses all too characteristic of American literature and culture.

Barthelme's texts manifest a "not-at-homeness," as critic Tony Tanner put it, partly because they are adrift in the gap between transcendence and immanence. Barthelme's heroes, like Percy's, know they must confine their activities to this world, but they also possess the Kierkegaardian wayfaring sensibility which tells them this world is not enough. Even Snow White is to be found reading the Catholic existentialist philosopher Teilhard de Chardin. In the story "See the Moon," Barthelme uses the figure of a Catholic cardinal to highlight this perception that earthly accident no longer necessarily incorporates spiritual essence: "If there is any value that has value, then it must lie outside the sphere of what happens and is the case, for all that happens and is the case is accidental...." The narrator promptly concludes that Cardinal Y is "not serious," but he himself seems to take up the cardinal's point just a few paragraphs later when he concludes: "One can measure and measure and miss the most essential thing." Precisely: if accident and essence are no longer consubstantial, then all catalogues and litanies are useless, for worldly instruments can never be used to measure what is "ineffable." It is another version of the old debate between Aquinas and Pascal: Aquinas claimed God could be embodied in material ways, Pascal asserted the two realms were quite distinct. Barthelme, like Percy, adheres more closely to the Pascalian position, and it is this which lends to his characters (as Maurice Couturier said) the sense of being chance, accidental figures "in a world teeming with universals." They continue to search for redemptive grace, and they do not seem able to abandon this quest, but religious essence appears to remain tantalizingly beyond their grasp.

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Come Back, Dr. Caligari, *Little, Brown & Co., 1971, $7.95.*
Snow White, *Atheneum, 1967, $6.95.*
Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts, *Pocket Books, 1978, $2.25.*
City Life, *Pocket Books, 1978, $2.25.*
Sadness, *Pocket Books, 1980, $2.95.*
The Dead Father, *Penguin, 1975, $6.95.*
Great Days, *Pocket Books, 1979, $2.50.*
Overnight to Many Distant Cities, *Penguin, 1983, $6.95.*
Paradise, *Penguin, 1986, $6.95.*

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POEMS
Anne Porter

Scott's Elegy

Some of the leaves
Are falling early
But there are glinting
Dragonflies
And the brown honeybee
Searches about
In the surviving roses

Flock after lilting flock
The birds are leaving
They ebb away
Out of the dotted sky
We watch them out of sight
The air
Is drained of summer

We're left behind
With apple-scented nights
With carillons of crickets
With planets bright
As the Nativity

And this new air
Whose coolness is itself
A kind of fragrance

And now
The earth breathes out
The unearthy blossoms
Of the autumn crocus
Around the tool shed door.

Wild Geese Alighting on a Lake

I watched them
As they neared the lake

They wheeled
In a wide arc
With beating wings
And then

They put their wings to sleep
And glided downward in a drift
Of pure abandonment

Until they touched
The surface of the lake

Composed their wings
And settled
On the rippling water
As though it were a nest.

Before the Frost

These are the nights
When every cricket sings
When in the dark around us
There is a flowering
Jubilant continuous
Festival of crickets

They sing together all night long
Drawing a pulsing
Chiming joy
Out of the dryness
Of their tiny bodies

The sky
Is black and clear tonight
The mountain village of the stars
Glitters in silence

But in the trilling crickets
Among the autumn grasses
The stars
Have found their voices.

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CONSERVATIVE OPPORTUNISM, LIBERAL COWARDICE

THE RACIALIZATION OF AMERICAN POLITICS

FRED SIEGEL

There is a question haunting American politics. Why is it, a quarter century after the civil rights revolution, that a substantial segment of black America is worse off than it was before? Roughly speaking, answers to that question break down into the "can't find work" and "won't find work" schools. The differences are, with numerous variations, a replay of the old saw about whether the slums make the people or the people make the slums.

Cornel West, director of Afro-American Studies at Princeton, sees these two camps as highlighting one of two explanatory mechanisms. Liberals, he writes in *Dissent* (Spring 1991), see African-Americans held back by "structural restraints" of both systemic racism and world capitalism, which have shifted the demand for unskilled labor out of the U.S. and into the third world. For liberals the solutions lie in an active government that supplies jobs, health care, and more money for the schools while restraining racism through widespread affirmative action programs.

Conservatives, by contrast, downplay white racism. They depict poverty as a problem of deviant behavior. From this perspective, black poverty, says West, is a product of broken families in which the youngsters, sometimes three and four generations removed from the last working parent, are cut off from middle-class life. Reviving the old "culture of poverty" arguments, conservatives contend that policy has to break the cycle of dependency produced by generation after generation growing up on welfare in fatherless homes. Overlooking, by and large, the problems of the working poor, conservatives see self-help and the free market as the remedy for the character ills produced by government handouts. West concludes that neither explanation can stand alone because structure and behavior are inseparable.

Given that inseparability, it's not surprising that there is substantial statistical and anecdotal evidence for both the "can't work" and "won't work" positions. But on the terrain of politics, the "won't work" school is the clear winner. The National Opinion Research Center polls show that 78 percent of whites think blacks are more likely to prefer to "live off welfare" than to work. The argument that the economy does not work for blacks, that they "can't work," is belied, in this view, by the success of new immigrant groups as well as the growth of a significant African-American middle and upper-middle class.

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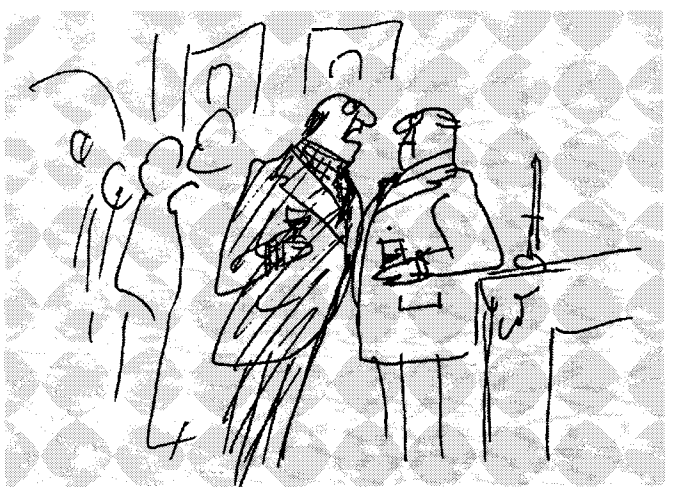
Two new books, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* by Tom and Mary Edsall; and *Minority Party: Why Democrats Face Defeat in 1992 and Beyond* by Peter Brown, lay out the dynamics of how the Republican party has reaped the rewards of aligning itself with the resentments of the "won't work" perspective. "The urban underclass," write the Edsalls (Tom Edsall covers politics for the *Washington Post*), "is the Achilles' heel of the liberal movement." Overwhelmed by the social pathologies found in the black ghettos of America's largest cities, most whites, and many blacks, have become skeptical about the once-powerful liberal argument that spending money on social welfare programs is an investment in the future.

Representative Thomas Finneran, the Democratic chair of the Ways and Means Committee of the Massachusetts House, who represents greater Boston, sees the social and cultural problems as so intractable that money is irrelevant. "It almost doesn't matter who is mayor [of Boston]. You could give him a billion dollars and he'd make little or no progress." This sentiment is echoed by "Louise," a school teacher and former Democrat, interviewed by Peter Brown: "I don't like this [racial] attitude in me....I don't think blacks are inferior, they just lack a work ethic and the system has reinforced that. Ten years ago, I would have cut my tongue out before I said 'those people' or 'those blacks.' Now as I see the neighborhood crumbling, I tend to generalize. I blame the Democrats, people like Ted Kennedy."

The Louises of the world are responding to more than pique. Washington, D.C., under the administration of former mayor



"Let's watch whose status quo we're calling obsolete, Mac!"

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Marion Barry is a perfect example. The D.C. government, protected from federal budget cuts by its status as the capital, increased overall spending between 1984 and 1989 by 50 percent, while expenditures on human services rose 82 percent. Yet black Southeast Washington descended into a despair so deep that it stirred a belief even among parts of the black middle class in conspiracy theories (about white plots to introduce AIDS and crack use) that would be ludicrous if the pain they reflected weren't so heartfelt.

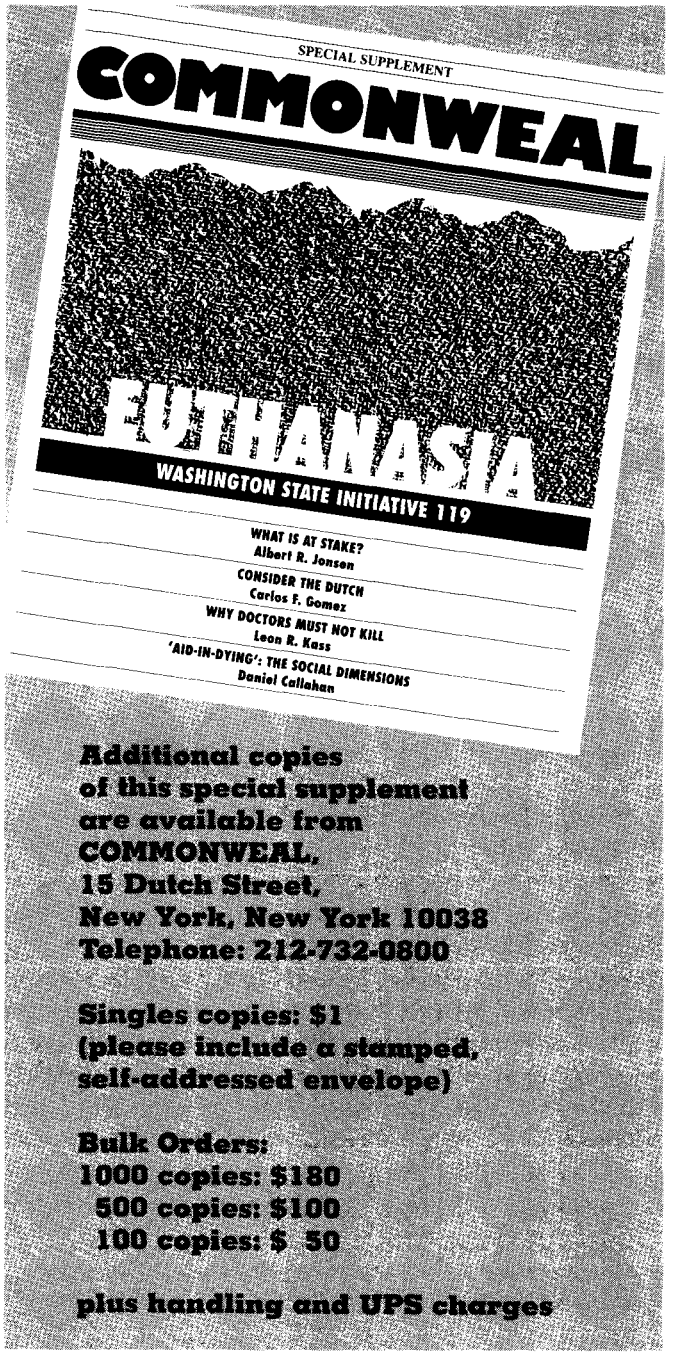
If the honesty and leadership of Barry can be called into question, that of New York's governor Mario Cuomo can not. Yet the outcomes have been similar. Under Cuomo, New York has increased per capita expenditure on education by between 60 and 80 percent during the 1980s. Yet there has been no discernible impact in the schools. Wherever the money goes (New York City and State have more educational administrators than all the countries of the European Economic Community), it is not reaching the black poor.

The public's attitude toward minority poverty has become intertwined with its declining trust in government. The Edsalls examine the connection between contempt for government and the conflict between the races. How is it, they ask, that the Republicans continue to control the White House despite the growth in income inequality over the past decade? The disparity in income between CEOs and line workers, already the widest in the industrialized world, doubled during the 1980s. "For crucial groups within the industrial working class the period from 1978-1982 represented a second great depression." Yet in roughly the same period, Democratic party identification among white, manual workers fell 15 points; among white high school graduates, 18 points; and among white professionals and managers, 11 points.

Chain Reaction shows that race, rather than social justice or economic equality, is now the filter through which many Americans, black and white, read government policy. In a carefully argued analysis, the Edsalls show how "working-class whites and corporate CEOs, once adversaries at the bargaining table, found common ideological ground in their shared hostility to expanding government intervention." While African-Americans associate government with the end of slavery and the triumph of civil rights, whites, whether in business or labor, have increasingly come to see government as a threat to their interests.

Laissez-faire ideology, in the Edsalls' view, did double duty for the Republicans, providing the argument for opposition to all regulation, economic and racial. The free market attack on government economic regulation was joined to criticism of what liberals call social programs, but which many whites have come to see as a racial spoils system. In the Republican rubric, why should government pick either economic or racial winners? The net result is that busing and affirmative action programs meant to achieve racial balance in schools and the workplace transformed the public perception of the Democrats from the party of economic equality into the party of minority privilege.

The Edsalls excel at showing how the rights revolution, ini-



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tiated by the movement for black freedom, and then extended into a variety of areas from students' rights to prisoner and welfare rights, has made civil rights into an economic as well as a moral issue. For a family unwilling to send its children to a public school that has been undermined by due process protections for disruptive students, or a neighborhood forced to pay for private security guards because there aren't nearly enough police, the rights revolution has turned out to be a costly matter. Liberalism, the Edsalls conclude, has become a victim of its own virtues.

Chain Reaction and *Minority Party* come to common conclusions about the overwhelming impact of race on American politics, but from very different perspectives. The Edsalls' approach is analytic, Brown's journalistic and anecdotal, yet both show how the rise of Republicanism in suburbia, the decline of the Democrats' trade union base, and the increase in international economic competition have drastically redrawn the political landscape. But where the Edsalls are liberals affronted by the racial and economic injustices of American society, Brown sees only blue skies and endless opportunity ahead if only the underclass would get on the bandwagon and join the great American parade.

The Edsalls refuse to blink at the heavy costs imposed by the need to compensate for suburbanization and the internationalization of the economy. Reading *Chain Reaction*, I was struck by the similarities among the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the dramatic decline of Communist parties in Western Europe, and the travails of trade unionism right here at home. All were hard hit by an internationalized economy in which the industries of the first and second industrial revolutions were transferred to newly developing countries. For example, in France the shut down of the giant Renault complex, which had traditionally delivered workers' votes for the left-wing parties, dealt a grievous blow to the Communists and Socialists. In the United States the areas that will lose the most in the 1990 census are regions with heavy industry-blue collar-trade union constituencies that have traditionally voted Democratic.

Along with E. J. Dionne's *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon and Schuster), the Edsalls' book is sure to be one of the two or three most important primers for the 1992 elections. Their hardheaded look at how race has replaced class as the key divisor in American politics is likely to produce discomfort among many liberals. Racialized politics, they show, didn't simply flood into an estuary and empty it of class politics. Class politics were also displaced by a cultural radicalism that was only too happy to trumpet its own superiority to the moral mildew of middle-class life.

In New York, for instance, a film produced in 1967 by Mayor John Lindsay to encourage open housing mocked the "ticky-tacky houses" of white, lower-middle class homeowners. Lindsay's late-sixties' coalition of "the best people" and the "bottom dwellers" anticipated the shape of liberalism to come. The Democrats, notes party consultant Robert Squier, disassociated themselves "from the idea of representative government"; we "did not (so much) go left, [as] we went up" the social scale. And while the party was going up, the voters were going out. For example, Brown notes that between 1984 and 1988 in Illinois, turnout in the Democratic primary dropped by 150,000 voters, while participation by people with incomes above $50,000 increased from 5 to 15 percent. In 1980, white Ohio was 11 points more Democratic than Republican; by 1990, after a 17-point shift, the Republicans had gained a 6-point advantage. Even more dramatically, white Ohioans under twenty-four years of age were Republican by a 64-25 margin.

The Edsalls have been attacked by *Rolling Stone* columnist William Greider, among others, for even discussing racial divisions. He detects "a whiff of old-fashioned scapegoating" in their account and insists on seeing racial preferences as unproblematic, much as many liberals persist in seeing abortion-on-demand as uncompromisable. Greider demands that Democrats delimit their discussions solely to economic inequalities. But both the Edsalls and Brown are persuasive in arguing that it is this very lack of debate that has helped cripple the Democratic party.

The Democrats have consistently declined to deploy the sophisticated polling needed to chart the choppy waters of a racialized politics. And what would they have done with the data had they gathered it? Brown describes a fascinating episode following the 1984 election. Party chair Paul Kirk had commissioned an independent, nonpolitical polling firm to do an extensive study of politics and racial attitudes. The report said that the party had "a dual identity" composed of ideological "liberals, on the one hand, and special interests (blacks, gays, Hispanics, feminists and labor), on the other hand. These two sets of 'owners' trade the party between themselves leaving the common man out of the picture." The report concluded that for many voters "it is these underclasses that signify the present image of the Democratic party."

Faced with the difficulty of dealing with the findings, Kirk chose to deep-six the report. Even then, its conclusions were already almost twenty years old. Although neither book takes note of it, the depth of the white backlash was well understood by the late '60s. Going into the midterm elections of 1966 and counting on what seemed like overwhelming support for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the AFL-CIO spoke exultantly of how a permanent liberal majority in Congress would finally complete the New Deal. But they had completely misjudged the impact of the riots in Watts and Newark. Ethnic neighborhoods that had gone two to one for LBJ in 1964 swung two to one against the Democrats in 1966.

Stunned by the size of the liberal defeat, Helmuth Kern, polit-

Books discussed in this article

Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics, *W.W. Norton, $22.95, 416 pp.*

Minority Party: Why Democrats Face Defeat in 1992 and Beyond, *Regnery Gateway, $21.95, 317 pp.*

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ical director of the Amalgamated Meatcutters, argued that liberals had been bushwhacked by a "vicious issue, which strangely enough was kept silent and hushed up: integration and civil rights." He concluded that for many traditional Democrats, "civil rights is now equated with losing the savings invested in your home."

Shaken by the defeat of forty-seven incumbents, almost all of them solid supporters of the Great Society, George Meany, AFL-CIO president, commissioned a poll whose "political findings were shocking." Union members, it seemed, were "more concerned with...property taxes, crime, and zoning regulations than they were with the welfare state agenda of the AFL-CIO." There was much that could have been discussed, but little could be said publicly in the wake of denunciations of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his report on the sad state of the black family. That attack on Moynihan's report, in effect, closed the subject of race and rights, at least among liberals, for nearly a quarter of a century.

Union leadership, in public at least, insisted that racial issues were a diversionary tactic by big business looking to revive right-to-work laws and therefore there was no need to discuss these issues with their members. In the long run, however, it was the liberal silence on race issues, to which the unions contributed, that brought on what the AFL-CIO most feared. The political Right and Republicans were left alone in public to define the issue and proceeded to produce the very linkage between racial and redistributive regulation that the unionists had feared.

In truth, there was no easy answer. Liberals worried, with good reason, that one cost of discussing the race question openly would be more bigotry. But now we see that perhaps the price of not speaking may have been even greater. When it comes to race, liberal Democrats speak a language unrecognizable to most white Americans, including many people of good will. When liberals speak of civil rights they have a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. in their mind. Most whites hear those same words and they see and hear Malcom X or one of his many current legatees, among whom Stokely Carmichael's assertion of twenty years ago, has become common fare: "integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy."

John Lewis, once a leader of SNCC and now a Georgia congressmen, analyzes it differently. "We made a serious mistake," he writes, "when the movement turned against its first principle: integration." "The seeds that were planted twenty years ago have borne bitter fruit, we started going our separate ways." Many liberal Democrats have yet to come to grips with the way black power long ago supplanted, with some notable exceptions, integration as the *beau* ideal of black militancy. But it is a transformation that many, if not most, white voters long ago noticed and now take for granted.

Much like the silently sullen white college students who are whipsawed by administrators and activists playing the same/different game—whereby they are open to charges of racism if they treat blacks either the same or differently—the average voter is at best bewildered and more often annoyed by the rules of racial regulation. A friend of Arkansas governor, and pres-

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idential candidate, Bill Clinton puts it succinctly: "I just don't understand the world we're living in. We need the federal courts to integrate our schools by race, but we need the federal courts to segregate our legislature by race."

Clear-cut notions of right and wrong once so compelling on the race issue have been replaced by a confusing checkerboard of both black progress and black privation. Black congressional leaders and their white liberal allies have too often played the game of bait and switch wherein they point to desperate black poverty as a warrant for programs that benefit those who have already "made it." By contrast, resentful whites and frightened politicians point to the rise of the black middle class as an argument to eliminate affirmative action altogether. It's a theme now being taken up not only by black conservatives, but by some on the left like the socialist weekly *In These Times*, which hopes that race-based affirmative action programs can be replaced with purely class-based ones. This is understandable, but largely wrongheaded.

It is true that in the 1980s black, upper-middle-class incomes grew more rapidly than comparable white incomes. By the early 1990s 15 percent of blacks had incomes above $50,000, two-and-a-half times the 1968 rate. But with all of these gains in income, the black middle class has achieved only a precarious prosperity and generally only in those occupations that involve either direct government employment or close EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) supervision. Nearly half of all black professionals work for government. Private sector gains are far more limited. Furthermore, as Brown notes, income figures do not convey total assets: black, middle-class households have one-tenth the assets of comparable white households—so that most middle-class blacks lack a family safety net if there is unemployment, illness, or other misfortunes.

If there is to be any hope for intergenerational black mobility in a period of declining college enrollments among blacks, it's essential that some form of affirmative action be maintained. What is open to debate is the form that it should take. It doesn't seem beyond the capacity of the Democrats to move toward the kind of system Justice Lewis Powell referred to in his once celebrated but now forgotten plurality decision in the *Bakke* case (1978). Powell suggested that just as in the matter of veterans' preferences, race could and should be a strongly weighed category in employment and in college admissions outreach but that it ought not be decisive. It's a balance that even liberal Democrats should be able to defend in public.

Furthermore, in the case of race norming (a practice in which tests are scored separately for white, black, and Hispanic groups, and defended by some as essential if blacks are to have access to better paying jobs that require such exams) a premium ought to be placed on: (1) requiring that minority test-takers be given the opportunity to raise their skill levels, and (2) insuring that norming be begun with an understanding that the differences in how the tests are scored will be narrowed over time. The fears that a segment of black America has now invested in a permanent set of separate standards, or what whites see increasingly as privileges, is part of what is driving racial polarization.

In "the great reversal," Republicans—known before the racial

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revolution as the party of Anglo-conformity and Protestant provincialism—are now seen by the public, fairly or not, as the party of universal values. Conservatives who had few objections when the quota for blacks was zero have successfully cloaked themselves in the mantle of a single standard of justice even as they, in fact, play their own cynical version of separatism. The Democrats, by contrast, once the universalist party of merit and equal opportunity, are now known as the party of minority favoritism. A party of fiercely self-identified minorities has become the minority party, at least where presidential politics is concerned, because the whole of its ferocious factions is far less then the sum of their narrowly liberal and particularist parts.

The Democrats' path to power, as I noted many times in *Commonweal*, especially during the 1988 elections, lies across a territory that they are politically and intellectually afraid to cross. As a start, they need to forthrightly acknowledge what they have suppressed since the Moynihan report: The problems of poverty are both structural and behavioral. Because the fact is, even if the Democrats won't deal with the race issue, it will continue to deal with them.

DOING FOR OURSELVES

BLACK DIRECTORS RECAST THE AMERICAN STORY

PAUL BAUMANN

The steamy ideological hothouse of New York City is never short on ethnic and racial strife. This past August saw some of the most bitter and violent conflict in years, when black rioters took to the streets of Brooklyn's Crown Heights in the aftermath of a traffic accident that killed a seven-year-old black boy. The driver of the car that killed the child was a Hasidic Jew from Crown Heights. Within hours a gang of black youths had stabbed a Hasidic man, who died later at the hospital. When David Dinkins, New York's black mayor, tried to calm the situation he was besieged by a black mob. Under the inspiration of the incendiary Reverend Al Sharpton and others on the fringe of New York's black politics, retributive violence was condoned and an overt anti-Semitism soon emerged. At the tumultuous funeral for the child, the crowd outside the church shouted "No justice, no peace," while inside, Dinkins pleaded with the congregation to "increase the peace."

In the glare of the mass media's craving for news and the entertainment industry's insatiable demand for "product," art and reality are notoriously promiscuous partners. Racial antagonism sells, both on the front page and in front of the cameras. This year African-American filmmakers, often taking their storylines from the headlines, have brought out movies of unprecedented power, among them, *Jungle Fever, Boyz N the Hood*, and *Straight Out of Brooklyn*. All take us into the everyday lives of African-Americans, and into the bewildering labyrinth of racism and black anguish, in ways rarely done before. Indeed, in urging his audience to "increase the peace," Dinkins was borrowing a line from the coda of *Boyz N the Hood*, a story of gang violence in Los Angeles.

Boyz N the Hood was written and directed by twenty-three-year-old film school graduate John Singleton, and is in many ways a very conventional coming-of-age story. Tre Styles (Cuba Gooding, Jr.), the film's appealing protagonist, triumphs over a broken home, a dangerous neighborhood, and the usual sexual and generational conflicts. The shape and trajectory of his journey are as familiar as any Horatio Alger story.

The action is set in a working-class neighborhood where the residents try to eke out a modest existence while drug dealers and other predators prowl the streets and police helicopters circle forever overhead. This is a frontier of sorts, one where a homeowner has to guard his property with a gun and strengthen his children against the wayward example of their friends. Gunshots punctuate the night, and children are as likely to stumble over a bullet-ridden corpse as a tricycle. Oppressed by a largely unseen

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world of white indifference and racism, this is a community most immediately savaged by its own. "They want us to kill ourselves," Styles's charismatic father (Larry Fishburne) warns the idle and belligerent young men in the neighborhood.

Boyz N the Hood is a grim tale in which economic marginalization and spiritual impoverishment breed a culture of mayhem and violence. Singleton is intent on documenting this reality, and his earnest attention to the temptations our materialistic culture presents the poor is reminiscent of the novels of Theodore Dreiser and James T. Farrell. Indeed, one emerges from *Boyz N the Hood*—and from *Straight Out of Brooklyn*—struck by how similar the historical plight of the urban underclass, regardless of race or ethnicity, has remained.

"Dennis had always had before him the example of the local hoodlums, and in his small-boy manner he had emulated them, leading his gang in expeditions to roll drunks, and in fights against neighborhood gangs of Jews and wops," novelist Farrell wrote of Dennis McDermott, a brutal Irish-American thug in his short story "The Scoop." "Reckless and possessed of volatile courage, he had grown to be a tough guy, hired as a slugger and strikebreaker, employed in the taxicab wars...." Any number of characters in B*oyz N the Hood* fit this description; only the names of the victims and the objects of dispute have changed.

Boyz N the Hood is not content to offer violent thrills or therapeutic rantings. Singleton is a moralistic moviemaker, and he has much to say about the black family, economic self-sufficiency, and racial solidarity. Styles's father is the dramatic and spiritual focus of these concerns. The elder Styles is enormously attractive in his protective attitude toward his son. With his taciturn courage, he's a kind of urban Shane, a man who rises regretfully to every challenge. As a parent he is positively archaic. Despite being clothed in the rhetoric of black chauvinism, his moral values are thoroughly traditional: neatness counts, responsibility must be taken for one's actions, especially sexual acts. Chores are assigned, homework done, one's room cleaned, gratifications postponed. Respect for one's elders is demanded: "You're the prince, I'm the king," his father tells Tre.

Adolescent sexuality, a topic of so much learned dispute these days, is dealt with in an equally didactic way. There is plenty of frank talk about condoms and sexually transmitted disease, but Tre's faithful girlfriend is heroically chaste out of religious conviction. This may seem like an anachronistic sentiment in an age where sexual abstinence is considered a species of repression. But in *Boyz N the Hood* sexual responsibility is never an isolated moral act; rather, it is tied to a whole system of values that work as a bulwark of sanity in a very dangerous world. Continence is a sign of self-reliance and respect.

Intriguingly, Styles's strength of character can be attributed to an equally fierce belief in an omnipresent white conspiracy. Singleton gives his exemplary patriarch a number of woodenly ideological speeches in which the plague of drugs, alcohol, and economic decay destroying the black community is blamed on white ambitions. The film's most disturbing character is a sadistic, self-hating black policeman who torments other blacks and whom Singleton clearly sees as the most morally degraded and spiritually depraved of men. But whatever the source of the problems, the

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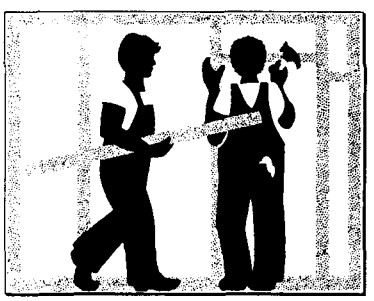

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solution remains the same: individual responsibility for one's actions and group solidarity. Moral accountability and social cohesion go hand-in-hand.

The resurrection of the black family, and by extension the reclamation of the black male as a figure of moral authority, are high on Singleton's list of necessities. "Only a real man can raise his children," Styles announces to his son. "I'm going to teach you how to be responsible." The father's determination to instill discipline and loyalty in his son enables Tre to overcome the most dangerous moral crisis of his youth, and thus escape to college—a traditionally black college, of course—and implicitly to a better future.

In part, Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* is about African-Americans who have moved on. Wesley Snipes, who plays the film's black hero Flipper, is an architect with a very upper-middle-class life. *Jungle Fever* is more explicitly about sex, even if the sexual "problem" is taken from newspaper headlines. Lee dedicated the film to Yusuf Hawkins, the young black man who was killed in 1989 by a white mob in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. Hawkins was mistaken for another black thought to be dating a local girl. In many ways, however, this film is as much about class as about racial stereotyping, although it does not succeed completely with either subject.

Flipper, a successful professional from Harlem, beds his temporary secretary Angie (Annabella Sciorra), a sensitive, Italian working-class daughter of Bensonhurst. "This film is about two people who are attracted to each other because of sexual mythology," Lee has said. Little of that mythology gets on the screen, however. We don't spend enough time with the emblematic couple, and the logic and intensity of the interracial romance are never developed. Angie, as played by Ms. Sciorra, isn't looking for a demonstration of black virility from Flipper but for a refuge from the meager emotional and psychological resources of her violent and patriarchal family. Having failed to tie these two people together either emotionally or as predatory sexual partners, *Jungle Fever*'s tearing them apart carries no larger resonance.

Flipper's relationship with his crack-addict brother, Gator, played brilliantly by Samuel L. Jackson, is more plausibly complex. Jackson delivers a mesmerizing performance as a lost soul, and his scenes with his parents, played by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, are the most harrowing in the movie. Gator's addiction confronts his already troubled parents with an insoluble dilemma: showing ordinary compassion for their son only exacerbates his condition. *Jungle Fever*, like *Boyz N the Hood*, eschews political sloganeering to focus on the tragic mystery of what was once called evil or sin. A haunting and shattering scream of despair over the utter moral depravity drugs force upon the African-American community brings the movie to an end.

Like *Boyz N the Hood*, *Straight Out of Brooklyn* concludes with a plaintive written exhortation. "First things learned are the hardest to forget.... We need to change." Directed by nineteen-year-old Matty Rich, *Straight Out of Brooklyn* is the bleakest of these pictures, its destructive action closest to the unredeemed world of Farrell's Irish-Catholic Chicago. It is also the most theatrically maladroit. The acting is stilted almost to the point of caricature, and the narrative fragmented and stagey. There is, however—and presumably more by accident than design—a disarming marriage of style and subject. Some hint of the emotional authority of cinéma vérité gives the movie a good deal of raw, seemingly unrehearsed power.

An aerial shot of a high-rise housing project in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn opens the film. Inside one of the small, beggarly furnished flats, Dennis, the film's misguided adolescent hero, cowers as his father rages on in a drunken stupor, breaking furniture and beating his wife. Driven by his father's abuse of the family, Dennis plots a robbery that he hopes will enable the family to flee the projects. Having accomplished the theft, Dennis's buddies get cold feet contemplating the implacable revenge of the drug lord. "I'm sorry man," says one. "I just can't kill myself that easy." With a sense of natural retribution that might have come out of *Macbeth*, *Straight Out of Brooklyn* chronicles the bloody consequences.

Rhetorically, Rich is eager to blame white society for the conditions of poor blacks. Dennis's father, who pumps gas for a white service station owner, is a bitter and seriously flawed man, but not, the film suggests, fundamentally immoral. "I understand how he feels," Dennis's mother reassures his sister. "We got to stand by him. We got to understand how that [racism] feels." And we do. In a drunken soliloquy before the bathroom mirror, he screams, "Hey white man, remember me?...I'm the man you destroyed. Just like you destroyed my father, and his father.... You don't want me to provide for my family. You don't want me to be a man.... I could have been a lawyer or a doctor. I believed that shit."

Tellingly, so does his son. "All we do is walk around the projects all day," Dennis complains to his buddies. On the tenement roof with the Statue of Liberty beckoning in the distance, Dennis elaborates on his robbery scheme and what the money would mean. "That's the American dream...so we don't have to live like animals." Walking with his girlfriend along the promenade in Brooklyn Heights, Dennis gestures toward the meretricious towers of Manhattan. "There is no wrong way out of here," he argues. "There's no right way.... How did they do it? By stepping on the black man. Money, that's what it's about."

"I can't be part of it," his level-headed girlfriend warns. (Black women are almost uniformly level-headed in all these movies.)

Of course the catastrophic consequences of Dennis's decision are meant as a rebuke of the politicized morality with which he tries to justify his actions. While an indictment of white racism, *Straight Out of Brooklyn* does not turn away from individual

Movies discussed in this article

Jungle Fever, *Universal Pictures*
Boyz N the Hood, *Columbia Pictures*
Straight Out of Brooklyn, *Samuel Goldwyn*

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responsibility, or from the illusion that white racism is the only obstacle to black dignity. Dennis dreamed that ill-gotten goods would take him and his loved ones "straight out of Brooklyn." It's not that simple, apparently. Rich puts what is in some ways the film's harshest judgment in the mouth of the black owner of a small restaurant. "Everybody's always saying how they're going to get out of Red Hook," the woman shakes her head. "But you've got to earn it."

Such vaguely conservative sentiments are given substantial space, if never explicit approval, in each of these movies. Consequently, what is most striking about these stories goes beyond the misery and injustice to which they testify. None exonerates white America. But each, obliquely or implicitly, assumes that African-Americans are in fact moving on.

Indeed, the anguish evident in these films—especially in the startling scream at the end of *Jungle Fever*—seems to derive from an exasperation over the emergence of parallel and manifestly unequal black realities. Economic and social enfranchisement are now finally possible for African-Americans like Flipper, who have the necessary skills. At the same time, that promised land is perhaps farther away than ever for the poorest. It is that gap between those blacks who have been left behind and those who must move forward that gives these movies such deep social resonance.

"I think we've done more to hold ourselves back than anybody," Spike Lee, no neoconservative, told Pete Hamill (*Esquire*, August 1991). "If anybody's seen all my films, I put most of the blame on our shoulders and say, 'Look, we're gonna have to do for ourselves'.... I feel we really have to address our financial base as a people."

As a result of the civil rights movement and the antipoverty and affirmative action programs of the last twenty-five years, a significant black middle class has taken shape. Admittedly, the black middle class is not as secure as the white. But these films testify to that progress both by the very fact that they've been made and in the aspirations for material well-being, spiritual dignity, and social participation attested to in the lives of the characters. Yes, the crisis of the urban underclass is acute, complex, and all too often defeating. But a legitimate compassion for the destitute can take our eyes off the homely but necessary path upon which social mobility is built. Spike Lee's moral realism is shared by many American blacks. According to the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset (*Times Literary Supplement*, May 31, 1991), blacks and whites actually agree to a remarkable extent on the nature of the problem. Lipset notes that a 1988 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll found that 60 percent of blacks and whites agreed that: "If blacks would try harder, they could be just as well off as whites." Moreover, "the same survey found 52 percent of blacks and 56 percent of whites believing that 'Discrimination has unfairly held down blacks, but many of the problems blacks in this country have today are brought on by blacks themselves.'"

Assessing blame is only useful if it contributes to solving a problem, not just berating the victims. But what Lipset argues,

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and what these films suggest, is that despite the significant historical differences between black and white American experience, the road to middle-class security taken by both groups looks remarkably the same. And much of that road is paved with the same mundane moral strategies and social values. "Blacks do not want a 'gilded ghetto,'" Lipset observes in looking at the statistics on black employment and social mobility. "They want to get out of the ghetto...[like] their predecessors in the ethnic immigrant slums."

None of these facts absolves American society of its racist history or from responsibility to redress the effect of historical inequities. But they do challenge the arid political radicalism that too eagerly assigns the black underclass (10 percent of the black population) center stage. For only a community cohesive enough to impose severe moral and social sanctions on aberrant behavior can curtail the kind of violence and social pathology afflicting the urban poor. As each of these movies documents, African-Americans, like most Americans, believe in the necessity and efficacy of such moral sanctions. Indeed, in his explicit moral code and fierce sense of earned virtue—even in his quirky ethnic paranoia and pride—Tre Styles's father is not so very different from the fathers and grandfathers of most white Americans. A liberal politics that continues to dismiss the traditional claims for personal accountability and social conformity dramatized by these films will find itself as irrelevant to the lives of the next generation of middle- and working-class African-Americans as liberalism is to the white ethnic middle class today.

MEDIA

'LIVE LONG & PROSPER'

THE 'TREK' GOES ON

Okay, okay. In these columns I've tried to talk about TV and politics, the Gulf War ("War" used as a courtesy to George Bush, whose prevarications I'm getting too tired to point out), the national psyche, the information-explosion, American mythology, and all that. But now, at the beginning of my third season with *Commonweal*, I figure it's time to cut to the bone.

Let's talk about "Star Trek."

In the first week of September, "Star Trek" celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary as—what? As the series that ran for three years in the mid-sixties? As the phenomenon that picked up an infinitely wider audience in seventies' and eighties' reruns than it had ever garnered when it was "live"? As the lead-pipe-cinch movie product that will continue this Christmas with the release of *Star Trek VI*, the "very *last*"—hardy har har—*Trek* film? Or as "Star Trek: The Next Generation," the series now beginning its fifth season, with a completely different cast from the original, and the hottest item in syndication?

As all of the above and more. Imagine being a literate fourteenth-century person asked the question, "But sir (or milady)—what *is* Arthurian romance?" How do you map the forest you're in the middle of? How do you codify the grammar of the way *you* speak?

I'm not kidding here. For a quarter century—God, that's half *my* life—this story, this situation, this myth, this *thing* has been entwining with, feeding, and feeding upon the national self-imagination, to the degree that by now I don't see how a serious attempt to describe the late twentieth-century American spirit—such as it is—can afford to ignore "Star Trek" as crucial to the equation.

That doesn't mean, of course, that it's "art"—a word that, as Amiri Baraka says, Americans always pronounce with simultaneous awe and contempt. I hang out sometimes with science-fiction writers. They're generally a more artsy-schmartsy lot than mystery writers, and most of them express unqualified contempt for "Trek," especially the original series. Harlan Ellison, who is one of the best writers I know and who contributed the two best scripts to the original show, used habitually to refer to it as "Star Dreck." And it's still worth your academic reputation (what a concept!) to appear at a high-powered s-f conference and discuss the show seriously in terms of the *genre* (what a concept!).

And yet. When NASA unveiled its prototype Space Shuttle—remember the space program?—it was named the *Enterprise*, and the Marine Band played the "Trek" theme. And when George Lucas made the most-successful-till-then film in history—remember when we judged films by their quality and not their first-week gross?—he called it *Star Wars*, surely a play on the name of our puzzling and lovely monster. And when Roseanne Barr—remember when she was funny?—said "My first marriage was a mixed marriage. I was an Earthling, he was a Klingon," she brought the house down, no footnotes needed.

Now *that's* what a real mythology is. Not a Joseph Campbell/Bill Moyers discourse for the brie-and-chablis set about the proper pronunciation of "Krishna," but a set of concepts, stories, names, and jokes to fit, and fit us into, the helter-skelter of the quotidian. Dreams are the stories that get us through the night, but myths are the stories that get us through the day. And that's what "Star Trek" was/is.

You must remember this: the original "Trek" was being made, under the auspices of that brave fellow, Gene Roddenberry, during probably the most shattering time most of the people reading this can remember. That's "Vietnam," which is itself a mythic name for the dismantling of every psychic edifice of cold-war American triumphalism. And though "Trek" never confronted that wasteland directly, its themes—and I've seen every episode at least thrice—seem uncannily responsive to the uncertainties and panics we all felt back then: The Enemy may not really *be* an enemy; the threatening alien may have his/her/its own pain which, once understood, makes it human; *we* may be better in our shared vulnerability than in our corporate self-assurance (ever notice how often things just break down on the *Enterprise*?). Those are the regnant ideas of the original series. And it's subversive, corny, sentimental stuff: like the regnant themes of any religion worth following.

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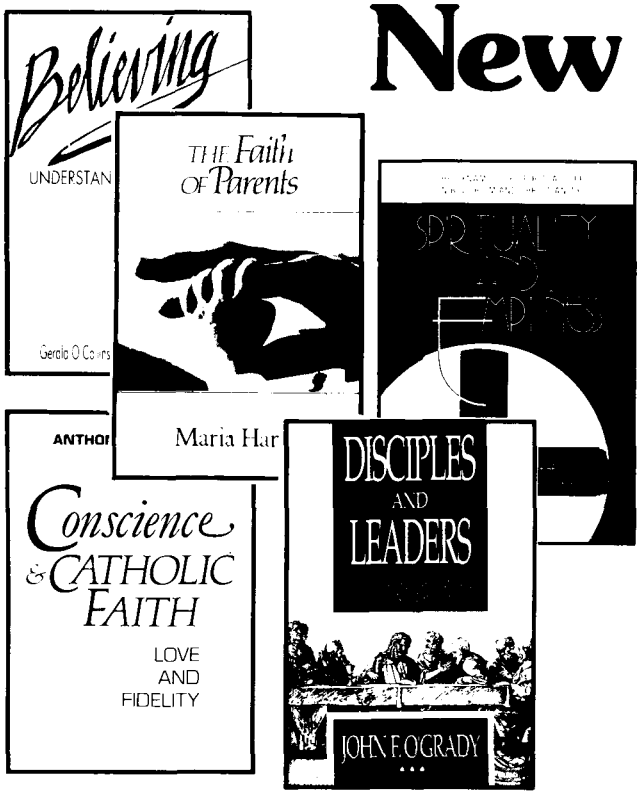

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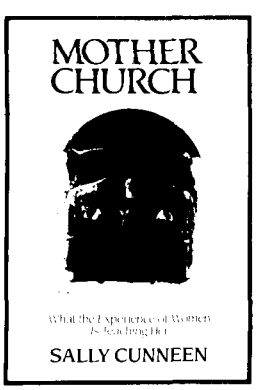

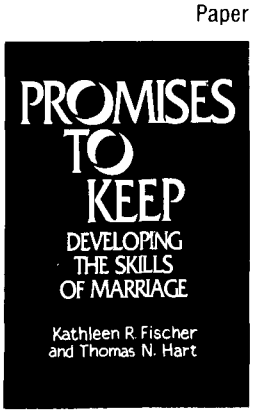

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In fact, I suspect that one reason for "Trek's" astonishing popularity in rerun after it was canceled has to do with the Vietnam syndrome. We are *all* victims of delayed stress over that war (the appalling Desert Storm being only the latest flashback-twitch), and maybe it wasn't till after the war was over that we could afford to look full-face at the internal carnage we had wrought upon ourselves, and see in "Trek" some kind of reassurance that, even in the midst of the craziness, some of us still kept in touch with the human factor.

Think about the central characters. McCoy, ship's doctor, who is all compassion and who therefore never thinks before he acts; Spock, the Vulcan who lives by logic and fights down—or tries to—any human emotion; and Kirk, the captain, who must be brave and decisive, but who is forever prey to his anxieties and self-doubts. Sound familiar? It should, because it's just the configuration of the *only* truly original American fairy tale. One needs a brain, one needs a heart, and one needs the nerve or, as Bert Lahr made the phrase forever his, "da noive." McCoy=Scarecrow, Spock=Tin Woodsman, Kirk=Cowardly Lion. And though each of them already has what he "needs," they only get what they need when they give it to one another.

But where's Dorothy? Just where she was in 1900, when L. Frank Baum wrote *The Wizard of Oz* as America was entering an unparalleled age of economic growth and greed, and in 1939 when MGM filmed *The Wizard of Oz* as America was on the brink of entering the still-after-tremoring cataclysm of our century. Dorothy is the one who just wants to go home. The one who has to learn that the People-in-Charge—a very bad wizard, but a very good man—can't be trusted farther than the reach of the heart itself. Dorothy is the idea of the Republic that justifies the reality of the State at the same time she undermines it. She's America and, in "Star Trek" in the sixties, she's the *Enterprise*: in a word, us. Homer knew it: a ship is always our world, looking for itself.

And then came Reagan. And George Herbert Walker Bush. ("Herbert," by the way, was immortalized in one "Trek" as a generic name for an officious, soulless bureaucrat. Prophecy or dumb luck?)

"Star Trek: The Next Generation" is much more high-tech than its precursor (which, let's face it, folks, was just a tad more sophisticated in f/x than 1938's *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*). And its scripts are—sorry, Harlan—more philosophically sophisticated than most of the originals. The new *Enterprise* even has a bar, tended by Whoopi Goldberg, which considerably eases *my* future shock. And better actors: William Shatner as Kirk always tried hard but always failed, whereas, Patrick Stewart as Capt. Jean-Luc Picard is as enviably gifted as in any other role you could think him into.

But *plus ça change*, right? After a decade of Reagan/Bush greed, vulgarity, and sanctioned-in-high-places cynicism, the *Enterprise*—and doesn't that name start to shine with the sad glow of our all-but-lost hope?—the *Enterprise* is still Dorothy, America looking for its center, which is of course its best possible self. It's internationalized, *perestroikated* (a word I am proud to coin) now: even the hated and feared Klingons are part of the crew now, voyaging with us "where no one has gone before"—which, of course, is where you and I are always, we can't help it, going. (And the Klingons became our pals four years before Gorbachev and Yeltsin nailed that plot-change down in the real world.)

So if the first "Trek" was really about, How do we preserve our humanity in a system gone manic? the second, it seems to me, is about, How do we preserve our differences and our individuality in a New World Order that wants to make us all the same? That's a good question, as we coast toward the year 2001. And I must tell you, old symbol-shuffler that I am, I trust "Star Trek's" answers to that question a hell of a lot more than I trust anything offered by *anybody* currently in power anywhere on the planet.

FRANK McCONNELL

STAGE

DESTRUCTIVE IDEALISTS

'KLINGHOFFER' & 'DIE TOTE STADT'

Now that John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer* has come and gone at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, perhaps it is possible to recollect the work in tranquility, to deal with the ideational attacks that confused the reception of the opera. I do not think that the piece is anti-Semitic and pro-Arab, although it is easy to see where that response comes from. The twin choruses in the prologue—the exiled Palestinians and the exiled Jews—are supposed to set the noncommittal balance of the work (the creators hoped that it would reflect the complexity of the situation in the Middle East), but that balance is thrown off by the fact that the Palestinian chorus focuses on the loss of home in the immediate sense, the Jewish one speaks more generally. To make matters worse, these choruses are wrapped around a sequence in which a stereotypical affluent American middle-class Jewish family is presented satirically, an odd introduction to the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*. There is nothing in that scene that has not been presented frequently on the American stage, but the caricature is grating in this context. These people are friends of the Klinghoffers and presumably representatives of their society (although their name—Rumor—suggests something more metaphorical). I assume that out of this bromidic background, the authors of the opera wanted to rescue the Klinghoffers, to transform them through death and suffering, but to many viewers (including the Klinghoffer daughters), the prologue demeaned the events.

Edward Rothstein, in his dismissal of the work in the *New York Times*, said that the Israeli position "is collapsed into scorn of American Jews and anybody else without mythic claims on the world's attention," and he cites the chorus of Hagar and the Angel as an instance of staking the Arab claim. Despite the presumed connection between the hijackers and their mythic past and the gentle presentation of Mamoud in a scene with the ship's captain, the Arabs are hardly designed to win the hearts of the

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audience. There is nothing remotely heroic about shooting a wheel-chair ridden man and throwing his body overboard. Beyond the ugliness of the central action of the opera, the Arabs are presented as disconnected, one from another and from the forces out there who presumably have organized their attack on the ship. "Rambo" is a nasty bully, made nastier by his holding a gun, and he deserves Klinghoffer's denunciation, although Klinghoffer sees the brutality as generic rather than specific. Omar's invocation of the holy death he wants—an effective aria—is muddied by the fact that such a death involves holy killing, too, and Molqi, the leader of the group, sings that they are idealists. Whatever librettist Alice Goodman had in mind, the song recalled for me Bernard Shaw's conviction that it is the idealists who bring destruction to the world.

Neither Jews nor Arabs come off particularly well in *Klinghoffer*. How does opera and theater do? The new work has none of the surprise, the exuberance, the wit of the earlier Adams-Goodman-Peter Sellars opera, *Nixon in China*. It is as though the subject—as tragedy, as political comment—had placed a leaden hand on the participants. There were fine voices (*Nixon* alumni Sanford Sylvan and James Maddalena, for instance) and effective numbers although it became too pat for Sellars to drape the principals around the lead singer in the second-act arias. Adams was using less of his signature minimalist tick-tick-tick here, going for something like conventional operatic form in many of the arias. Sometimes the double casting of characters with singers and dancers worked well, as in the effective business with the long cloth (shroud? waves?) in which the two Klinghoffers shared space and action after the death of the character. Too much of the time, however, Mark Morris's dancers repeated the same sweeping half-circle turns which pushed them toward cliché. George Tsypin's multiple-level, erector-set skeleton for the ship was wonderfully startling when we first saw it, but its size and its static quality finally trapped the performers who were sent scurrying up and down to little purpose. Anyone who has looked at the libretto of *Nixon in China* knows that Goodman is a pedestrian writer, but *Klinghoffer* underlined that fact by using supertitles. Best not to look at Goodman's words, but to let them be swallowed by Adams's music.

Despite the negative judgments that mark the paragraphs above, there was much to admire in *The Death of Klinghoffer*. Even so—and perhaps it is a comment on me rather than Adams, et al.—I had a more rewarding evening with Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* at the New York City Opera. This is the revival of the NYCO's 1975 production of the work. Korngold's romantic setting of Georges Rodenbach's turn-of-the-century symbolist novel, *Bruges-la-Morte*, tries to capture some of the atmosphere of his source. As though the twenty-four-year-old Korngold in 1920 knew that he would end up in Hollywood, his librettist (the pseudonymous Paul Schott, actually Korngold and his father) has imposed a frame on Rodenbach's lugubrious tale, has turned it into a dream which allows the mourning hero to escape both his dead wife and his invented version of her evil other self and return to the living world. Although the end of Rodenbach's book, in which his protagonist wanders the city, muttering, "*Morte... morte... Bruges-la-Morte*," is a bit much after the fashion of the genre, Korngold's upbeat rescue of Paul seems arbitrary. Otherwise the composer approximates the feel of the novel, his additions (particularly Pierrot's lovely song) augmenting the original. The cast that I saw was first rate except for Stephanie Sundine, whose Marietta, supposedly a dancer, moved so klutzily that one longed for a light-footed Morris half-circle. Beyond score, beyond performances, the triumph of the piece was the staging. Conceived by Frank Corsaro (director) and Ronald Chase (films and projections), it used a double scrim on which pictures could reflect the city in fact and in Rodenbachish fancy, the accusing religious procession and the chaos that the troubled Paul carried in his head. Unlike *The Death of Klinghoffer*, in which the thematic material overrides song and story, *Die tote Stadt* can be taken as a serious life-over-death statement or more immediately as a grandly romantic piece.

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Never far from home

SAINT MAYBE
Anne Tyler
Knopf, $22, 337 pp.

THE NIGHT TRAVELERS
Elizabeth Spencer
Viking, $21.95, 366 pp.

Crystal Gromer

Anne Tyler's new novel, her twelfth, opens as many of her books do, with the moment just before the event occurs that will change the way a family is living its life. It is 1965, and we are told at the outset that the family is known emphatically as the Bedloe family, not just the Bedloes. So deeply ingrained is their image as all-American family—mother homemaker, father high-school teacher and coach, and three children—that the neighborhood fondly shares a collective memory of them long since out of date, as we might share a memory of a television show cancelled decades ago, "Ozzie and Harriet," say, or "Leave It to Beaver." They are that kind of family. "They believed that every part of their life was absolutely wonderful." The mother, Bee Bedloe, especially believes this, and she is the family architect, continually striving to make constructions, more artful than any situation comedy plot, that fit events into her view and make them the Bedloe view. It is as though she is able to lifeproof her family by making them into stories.

She does her best. She calls her husband a popular teacher when he is a poor one (she also calls him an "educator"); she makes light of her daughter's propensity for procreation (a force so formidable that the children are named in alphabethical order); she applauds her elder son's decision to go directly from high-school football captain to post office clerk, bypassing college, as a sign of knowing what he wanted, and that he is still at the post office a dozen or so years later, a sign that he is contented. Only Bee's younger son, Ian, seems restless with his mother's storytelling. But, adolescent when we meet him, he accepts his mother's stories and is full of his own besides. Ian is the kind of teenager who charms everyone, to whom no teacher will give less than a C even though he hasn't earned it. "Ian was seventeen and, like the rest of his family, large-boned and handsome and easygoing, quick to make friends, fond of a good time. He had the Bedloe golden-brown hair, golden skin, and sleepy-looking brown eyes, although his mouth was his mother's, a pale beige mouth quirking upward at the corners." So begins the description of him that concludes, "He was a medium kind of guy, all in all." For all of that, like any medium kind of guy he has images of himself as the hero of his own life. Walking up the steps to his house, he sees his film biography: "Ian climbed the steps. He opened the door. He entered the kitchen."

Something happens. Just as Ian can make of the ordinary the potentially heroic ("He set his books on the table"), Bee has always been able to take in large chunks of life and order them. Her face grows tight and fragile when the elder Bedloe son, Danny, introduces his parents to "the woman who's changed my life" and it turns out that this woman, Lucy Dean— who with her long black hair and black lashes and white skin and ruby mouth and tiny waist could be cast as the virgin Snow White—is in reality the divorced mother of two and a waitress at the Fill 'Er Up Cafe. But the parent Bedloes take this in stride, "smiling extra hard as if someone had just informed them they were being photographed."

What happens—and what they cannot take in stride— is that not very long after his marriage to Lucy and the birth of Lucy's youngest child, Danny dies, and for this there are no stories, no revisions that will do any good.

Did Lucy change Danny's life, as he said? We see very little of that life, so we can't know. But we can transfer the question; we can think about the people who change other people's lives. Did Ian's remarks about Lucy send his drunken brother off to crash his car into a stone wall? How much does one family member affect another, all the others? How much of a life is, on the other hand, up to chance? And how do the deliberate and the accidental interweave? These questions are some of the questions the novel asks us to think about as we watch what becomes of the Bedloes.

Danny will always be dead. With no more sense of mortality than any teenager, Ian faces up to that—and equally to his own sense of guilt over his brother's death. This knowledge is something he cannot share with his mother, whose gloss on life does not include death. At the loss of her son, she is suddenly frail, and not just because of her arthritic knees. How deftly, astutely, sympathetically, Anne Tyler draws her portraits, as, for instance, when she shows us how their son's death ages Bee and Doug Bedloe in an instant. They are too old to take on Lucy's three children, for Lucy, too, dies—of depression and sleeping pills and, it may be, the magnitude of the tasks in front of her: to clean her kitchen, to clean her children, to find a plumber, to find a husband. It's easier to die, so she does.

The novel is strongest when the three orphaned children are on center stage, for no one accords to children the seriousness and the fullness of treatment, the complexity and the humor, that Anne Tyler does, and it is her greatest strength. She lets us

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know these children immediately. The eldest, Agatha, is "the kind of child who breathed through her mouth." She is stolid. She is responsible. In one scene, we see her when she is about seven years old, worrying about the overflowing toilet and her overdosing mother. Thomas is bright and nimble and left with the younger sibling's useless refrain, "You're not the boss of me," pulling the covers over his head. Youngest of all, the baby Daphne sings out "La!" when she wakes from a nap, and "La!" again until somebody picks her up; this will hold her in pretty good stead in life, although sometimes, from her earliest days, she has to wait a long and uncomfortable time.

After one semester of college, Ian drops out to take care of the three children, a decision he reaches after a conversion experience. But only a taste of Flannery O' Connor filters through Anne Tyler's rendition of The Church of the Second Chance. Pale, beige, drab, flat: these are the qualities that interest Tyler, and that may leave a reader longing for O'Connor's passion and flamboyance. Socrates believed that the soul was the structure of personality, a view not discordant with Christian belief. In giving up his soul to God, or at least to the church, Ian abandons his personality. He may be a saint, but he's awfully boring. No longer Ian, he is Brother Ian. At the dinner table, he talks about God with Sister Harriet (who's pretty beige too, and somewhat stocky) as though a place had been laid for Him. Ian himself early on notes how embarrassed people are when the subject of God is brought up; since he is endlessly bringing up God or good works or Bible school, since he is endlessly brothering and sistering, readers are embarrassed to be in his presence, wanting to avert their eyes. It is hard to read a novel with eyes averted. One wants to shake Ian and make him live; one wants to tell him that children are not to be taken on as reparation, that life is not a duty. Ian is profoundly passive, and even the woman he marries, a woman of prodigious drive and quirky, interesting intelligence, a woman very much like Muriel in *The Accidental Tourist*, cannot wrest him from it. A reader has no chance.

Elizabeth Spencer's novel is as full of passion as Anne Tyler's is deliberately absent of it, and for that reason, though it is not as beautifully crafted as Tyler's, it is far more powerful and far more satisfying to read.

There is no completeness in *The Night Travelers*; rather there are guesses, suggestions—those intimations with which we get through life. The first, when the protagonist, Mary Kerr Harbison, is a very small child, is the absence of a kitten, last seen in her mother's lab coat pocket. This kitten had clawed the furniture, made her mother angry; it then is simply and permanently absent. Mary Kerr knows this, but she crawls out on the roof in search of Mopsy anyway, full of the ache of the childhood experience of loss, understanding and not understanding at the same time.

It is Mary Kerr's fate to experience a great deal of loss, often enough—far too often—as the result of her mother's manipulations. We see her first as a kind of elfin child, small and delicate, a sprite: "she seemed not to weigh anything, to be an essence with nothing solid about her." But this does not mean she is insubstantial; rather, she is spirited, and a fire lights up her small frame and drives her to do and to have what she most loves. In every action she is countered by her mother, and Kate Harbison is fierce, as determined as her daughter to have her way, with far more power behind her.

Mary Kerr grows up—and grows up to be a dancer, her first passion—in North Carolina in the 1960s. She reaches late adolescence and early love in the tumult of the student strikes and protests against the war in Vietnam. Jefferson Blaise, her boyfriend and later her husband, is one of the student leaders. He is as impassioned

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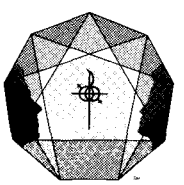

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about his political effort as Mary Kerr is about her dancing, and he ends up taking a route that forces him underground, hence the Night Travelers of the title. By night and by stealth they travel—to Canada for a time, where Mary Kerr has a baby and a depression so profound it leads her to a thwarted suicide. By indirection and by secret they communicate when Jeff leaves again to take on his own kind of war work. Loneliness and loss and hope share unequal places in Mary Kerr's full heart.

Whatever the events of her life, she returns to the struggle with her mother, a struggle that cannot be resolved any more than life can be. She must resist her mother in everything, since her mother would take away her profession, her husband, her child —her very soul if that were possible— but for all of Mary Kerr's resistance, there are times when she wants to give in, when the child's longing to be loved by her mother overcomes her. The power of the relationship between Kate and Mary Kerr Harbison is eerie, lifelike; it is subtle, and it is constantly changing. The power of Elizabeth Spencer's telling of it is extraordinary, and though the mother-daughter relationship is at the periphery of the story of the young girl growing up and marrying, it is at the center of the novel's effect. That effect is both disquieting and enriching. □

LABOR WILL RISE AGAIN—MAYBE

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?
Trying to Be for Labor When It's Flat on Its Back
Thomas Geoghegan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $19.95, 287 pp.

George G. Higgins

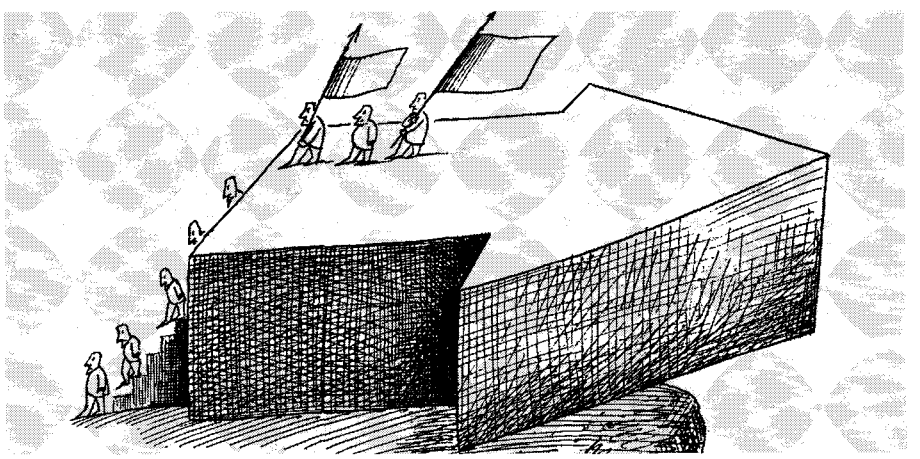
Thomas Geoghegan has been aptly described by one sympathetic reviewer as "a child of the sixties reliving the social struggles of the thirties in the Chicago of the nineties." Indeed, by his own repeated admission, Geoghegan is "obsessed with the thirties, with John L. Lewis, and with the New Deal." Looking back romantically to what he thinks of as labor's Golden Age, he says on page one of his exciting book that organized labor "was a cause in the thirties. Now it is a dumb, stupid mastodon of a thing crawling off to Bal Harbour to die. How did it outlive George Meany?"

Turned off by this kind of condescending yuppie rhetoric, I was tempted to stop reading the book then and there. I could see no point in plowing through yet another patronizing jeremiad about the decline and fall of the labor movement (and the malfeasance of its leaders) written by yet another disillusioned liberal intellectual. Beguiled, however, by Geoghegan's literary style (he writes like an angel, albeit a bit too preciously at times), I swallowed hard and read the book from cover to cover in two long sittings. It was more than worth the effort. Early on in the first chapter I discovered which side Geoghegan is on now that labor is flat on its back. He is decidedly on the side of the angels—i.e., of a strong and effective labor movement—and has had it up to here with "American liberals, even American radicals, [who] have more in common with the Reagan Right than with us. All of them, the whole bunch, are middle-class Emersonian individualists. Emerson, Thoreau, all of these guys are scabs. Lane Kirkland is outside the American consensus in a way that even Abbie Hoffman never was."

Geoghegan, who tends to exaggerate, observes that once upon a time (meaning, of course, in the mythical thirties) there were many labor books. "In almost every bookstore," he writes, "there would be a whole section for 'Labor' the way there is today for 'Self-Help' or 'Sex.' And if you go down to the old used-bookstores around the University of Chicago, and climb the creaky wooden stairs to the basement, and keep from fainting over the mold and mildew you can still see some of these 'Labor' books. Hundreds, I'd say, that were published in the thirties and forties during labor's Golden Age."

Hundreds? Not quite. And in fact labor books are still being published in significant numbers in the nineties—though many if not most of them are decidedly bearish about the future of the American labor movement. It will add further to historical focus to note that Geoghegan's own book is being more widely and more favorably reviewed than all but the best of the labor books that came out in the thirties. Critics of all ideological persuasions—right, left, and center—are vying with one another to promote *Which Side Are You On?* This is a veritable *tour de force*.

Perhaps I am being naive, but I take this phenomenon to mean that Geoghegan may (not necessarily will, but just may) live long enough to see the American labor movement once again become as strong as it was, or as strong as he thinks it was, in the thirties. In other words, to judge from the reception the book has had, Geoghegan is not alone in thinking that, with labor flat



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on its back, now is the time for decent men and women to stand up and be counted on labor's side.

This is not to say that Geoghegan is blind to labor's imperfections or its crimes. As a Harvard law graduate who got interested in organized labor almost by accident during his student days in Cambridge but has stayed the course ever since, he knows from firsthand experience with a variety of unions that the movement is far from perfect. He is enough of a realist, however, to understand that without unions, warts and all, there is little if any hope that the American economy will ever be democratized. He can think of nothing, he says, "no law, no civil rights act, that would radicalize this country more than to make this one tiny change in the law: To let people join unions, as their right, freely and without coercion, without threat of being fired, just as people are permitted to do in Europe and Canada."

Some will think Geoghegan puts too much hope in labor law reform and has an overly romantic view of labor-management relations in Europe and Canada. I think so myself. Nevertheless, it is hard to be critical of a Johnny-come-lately, middle-to-upper-class suburbanite who, at great personal sacrifice, is willing to go on as a lawyer representing the American labor movement now that it's flat on his back and who, to repeat, writes like an angel. More power to him. May his tribe increase.

THE 'BEST BLACK' SYNDROME

REFLECTIONS OF AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BABY
Stephen L. Carter
Basic Books, $23, 286 pp.

Don Wycliff

In early 1981 I got a firsthand experience of one of the phenomena that motivated Stephen L. Carter to write his book. I was working at the time as an editor on the Week in Review section of the *New York Times;* Ronald Reagan had been recently installed in the White House. I conceived the idea of a "dialogue" on black conservatism. A "dialogue," in our staff jargon, referred to an edited transcription of separate interviews with individuals on opposite sides of a current issue, each responding to the same questions.

My first choice on the conservative side was Thomas Sowell, the economist. But he, as was his practice, declined to talk to the press. I went to a second choice, Walter Williams, another economist, who readily agreed to participate.

For the black establishment, I wanted—and got—Benjamin Hooks, the head of the NAACP, but only after an enormous amount of wheedling and cajoling and flattering. I remember vividly one remark that Hooks made during our preliminary conversations. "We've tried," he said, referring to himself and the other establishment leaders, "not to give them [black conservatives] too much attention." One way that they did so was to avoid engaging in public debate—or private discussion—with them.

How times change! During the Senate Judiciary Committee's initial hearings on Clarence Thomas's nomination to the Supreme Court, it was the black conservative nominee who commanded the spotlight. Hooks, now cast in the role of the dissenter, was very nearly last on the bill and his testimony against the nomination got relatively little public attention.

But this really turns out to be a case in which the more things change, the more they stay the same. The fact is that, even at this late date, black conservatives and leaders of the black establishment don't talk to each other very much, if at all. And Stephen Carter considers that a tragedy. "Silencing debate solves no problems; it only limits the range of possible solutions."

The bulk of the attention paid to Carter's book so far has focused on Carter's heterodox position on affirmative action. Given the title and the ongoing national debate over the issue, that is only to be expected.

At least as interesting and as poignant, however, is Carter's discussion of how dissent and dissenters are suppressed in the black community—and what happens to the community as a result.

Blacks, Carter says, are particularly in need of internal discussion and debate. "[I]n an era in which a third of black people still live in poverty, when the inner cities are besieged by drugs and crime, when nearly a quarter of our children are themselves having children, we cannot afford the luxury of insisting, in the name of solidarity, that any of our problems has a single, unchallengeable answer."

Yet, he says, that is precisely the luxury in which the black community—or at least its traditional leadership—insists on indulging. "All too few new ideas are being generated, and some of the old ones—such as the need for widespread systems of racial preference in college admission and employment—seem increasingly irrelevant, yet are defended with a desperation that often turns to virulence."

Anyone who doubts that characterization need only reflect on the experience of Clarence Thomas. Thomas had not gone out of his way to ingratiate himself with the civil rights establishment as he worked his way upward in Washington over the last decade. But

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neither had the establishment extended itself to him as a potential source of wisdom or of entrée to the Reagan administration.

Thomas's crucial failure was not to embrace what Carter contends has become the shibboleth of the civil rights leadership: affirmative action. That failure marked him as an outsider and an enemy, and nothing could make up for that.

The ferocity of the black attack on this conservative black nominee to the Supreme Court—the dean of a New York City law school compared him to a "black snake"—could not be accounted for simply on the basis of intellectual disagreement. This was a tribal reaction, a community retaliating against one considered a traitor and a betrayer.

And what about this shibboleth, affirmative action? Carter is deeply ambivalent about it but, unlike Thomas, for example, or Shelby Steele, he isn't willing to say that it simply ought to be done away with.

The reasons for Carter's ambivalence are clear in the account of his own experience. Child of a Cornell University faculty member, he found himself excluded from consideration for a prestigious National Merit Scholarship despite his having earned the second highest score in his high school. Instead, he was shunted into the National Achievement Scholarship program, reserved for the best black students, while white classmates with lower scores got National Merits.

"I call it the 'the best black' syndrome, and all black people who have done well in school are familiar with it," Carter writes. "This dichotomy between 'best' and 'best black' is not merely something manufactured by racists to denigrate the abilities of professionals who are not white. On the contrary, the durable and demeaning stereotype of black people as unable to compete with white ones is reinforced by advocates of certain forms of affirmative action."

What can save affirmative action, Carter says, is a return to its roots. Forget all the justifications on the basis of enhancing diversity and adding to the range of perspectives available in schools or colleges or the broadcast industry or any other arena. The only valid justification, he says, is to give people who otherwise might not get one, a chance to show what they can do. Once given a break, they must put up or shut up. And at some point, there ought to be no more need for breaks.

It would be nice to think that so sensible and simple an approach could be achieved. But on this issue, we seem to be past the point where anything can be either simple or sensible. □

"I've warned you, bishop ...no politics."

THE BISHOPS GET USED

CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN AMERICAN POLITICS
Timothy A. Byrnes
Princeton University Press, $29.95, 177 pp.

James T. Fisher

Timothy A. Byrnes argues, in this short book on a very large topic, that the prominence of Catholic bishops in American politics since the late 1960s owes more to the electoral strategies of national parties than to the hierarchy's desire to influence voting behavior.

The collapse of the New Deal coalition and the political realignments of the past three decades loom large in Byrnes's analysis of recent American politics, and he gives it a provocative twist. "Realignment," he writes, "is now more than an analytical theory of political change; it is also a political strategy designed to cause that change." That is, the belief that the political landscape is periodically reconfigured inspired Republican party professionals to hasten that process by creating new issues to unsettle traditional voter loyalties. Catholics became a key target of these postmodern pols, according to Byrnes, because their presumed conservatism on social issues could help defeat Democratic presidential candidates in the urban Northeast and Midwest.

The bishops played a crucial role in this realignment because, although few believed by the 1970s that they could deliver the masses of Catholic voters to a candidate or party, they could "affect that vote at the margins" where elections are won or lost. But first they neeeded to surmount the defensive provincialism which characterized their activities in the era of the "immigrant church." Byrnes explains that even so prominent an institution as the National Catholic Welfare Conference was rebuffed in the 1920s by Cardinal William O'Connell of Boston in its efforts to promote national legislation on child labor. The bishops saw their role as protecting the interests of an embattled subculture: as late as 1962 "the bishops' political role...continued to be a direct function of their authoritative leadership of a clearly identifiable minority."

The "two Johns," John XXIII and John F. Kennedy, and all they represented helped transform the role of the bishops in American politics. Catholics in this country, as we know, became more self-confident, sophisticated, and national in their outlook. To this familiar story Byrnes adds a valuable discussion of the 1966 founding of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, inspired by the Vatican Council's "Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office" and charged with providing a national forum for the collective voice of the hierarchy. Catholic liberals warmly applauded this development: Just as the Democratic party had utilized the growth of central government to further a progressive social agenda, so too would the bishops speak powerfully in the unique Catholic idiom of social justice.

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The struggle over abortion rights intervened, changing forever the relationship between the bishops and American politics. Byrnes demonstrates that by 1967 the bishops were committed to opposing the legalization of abortion, at precisely the moment when Richard Nixon and his handlers were discovering the power of divisive issues to attract new voters. In 1970 Republican registrars in California would stand outside of Catholic churches to entice communicants to switch parties. Nixon's "Catholic strategy" was particularly effective in his 1972 campaign, when, in a public letter to Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York, he "disavowed the prochoice findings of his own presidential commission on population." By 1976 the bishops were ready to press for a constitutional amendment banning abortion and soon found their position construed as an endorsement of President Gerald Ford in his race against Jimmy Carter. The bishops had thus become political actors in a volatile environment over which they had little control. On the one hand, as Byrnes acknowledges, they actually enjoyed little authority over Catholics as voters (abortion proved not to be a factor in the election results). At the same time, their positions could be ignored by party leaders when they cut across partisan lines, as Cardinal Joseph Bernardin discovered in his efforts to promote a "seamless garment" agenda on a variety of "life" issues.

The bishops' subsequent pastorals on nuclear weapons and the economy had little political impact in Byrnes's judgment because they were too radical to fit the context of party politics in the 1980s. And he sees no signs that the Democratic party plans either to move to the left on these issues, or to abandon its prochoice abortion position. At the same time, a powerful bloc of bishops led by Cardinals John O'Connor and Bernard Law emerged in the 1980s to insist that abortion remain the central issue of Catholic politics. These leaders found a ready following within the New Right; their adversarial positions were directly linked to criticism of specific candidates—most notably Geraldine Ferraro, in the case of O'Connor.

For all of Byrnes's interest in models of political realignment, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is really a book about bishops and the politics of abortion. If Catholics have left the Democratic party in droves it is not at all clear that "moral issues" are the reason. But it is clear that individual bishops have enjoyed their greatest political successes as part of a broader coalition oriented toward Republican, if not New Right, positions on crucial issues. Byrnes astutely notes that the return of the abortion struggle to the state level may bring the bishops to focus once again on local politics, devising nonsectarian strategies to influence state legislatures.

Catholic Bishops in American Politics is a judicious if somewhat narrowly focused study which should provoke many large questions for other scholars: How are we to understand the relationship between the political activities of the bishops and the political identities of the rest of the church's people? Do the bishops fully understand the political realignment to which they have, sometimes unwittingly, contributed? This is a book for thinking hard about the political dimensions of episcopal leadership.

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WANTED: A NEW PUBLIC LANGUAGE

RIGHTS TALK
The Impoverishment of Political Discourse
Mary Ann Glendon
The Free Press, $22.95, 218 pp.

David Hollenbach

This is an excellent post-cold war book. Through careful comparative analysis of the legal systems of the North Atlantic nations, it demonstrates that there is more than one way to organize a successful democracy.

The book is an appreciative but strongly critical assessment of "rights talk" in the United States today. Glendon argues that the language of rights used by the American founders to knit together a religiously and culturally diverse republic has lately become a divisive force. Over the past half century, appeals to rights have become the principal way of addressing issues of public morality—from womb to tomb. These rights-claims, she says, are absolutist, hyperindividualist, and independent of considerations of responsibility toward the common good. This language is unable to deal with the thickening web of interdependence linking persons with each other and with the natural environment. Because we lack a public language that enables us to address communal relatedness with clarity, the social dimension of our existence has become confused and torn by conflict. Rights talk today is both a cause and symptom of such confusion, eminently suited for politics via sound bite and bumper sticker.

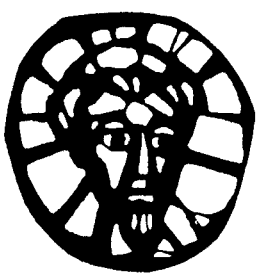
Glendon does not want to abolish talk of rights from public discourse. Rather she wants to change the *way* citizens and especially lawyers and judges speak this language. Drawing on her expertise in comparative law (which she teaches at Harvard Law School), Glendon points to France, Germany, and Canada to show that rights can be invoked in a way more compatible with concern for the common good than is the case in this country.

In the American tradition, under the influence of the English political philosopher John Locke, the right to property was the paradigmatic right. Despite important evolution in the law, the idea that rights define a sphere of unimpeded individual autonomy is alive and well in the right to privacy or the "right to be let alone," which Harvard Law Dean Erwin Griswold proclaimed to be "the underlying theme of the Bill of Rights." It has become increasingly prominent in recent jurisprudence (e.g., *Roe* v. *Wade*).

In contrast to Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau insisted that property rights are subordinate to the overriding claims of the community, that owners are trustees for the public good, and that human beings have a right to basic subsistence. Glendon argues that the influence of such ideas led Germany and France to synthesize classical ideas of the common good and biblical understandings of stewardship and concern for the vulnerable with Enlightenment ideas of freedom. *Mirabile dictu,* she thinks that, somehow, Western Europe may yet be more Christian than the United States, at least in its legal self-understandings. For example, the 1949 Basic Law of West Germany states both that "property and the right of inheritance shall be guaranteed," and that "property imposes duties. Its use shall also serve the public weal."

Instead of a right to privacy that barricades the individual against the world, German and French basic law affirms the right to the development of "personality." In 1957 the German *Bundesgerichtshof* declared the development of personality consists "precisely in the individual's reaching out beyond himself" in relationships with others. So both Germany and France have constitutional provisions that guarantee the conditions for individuals to enter into a rich social existence in freedom. French constitutional law provides that "the nation shall ensure to the individual and the family the conditions necessary to their development." The West German Constitutional Court had recently declared that the state is obliged not only to meet the subsistence needs of German citizens, but to stimulate the social conditions that enable or empower individuals to pursue a dignified life. Such language stands in stark contrast to chronic American aversion to the idea that rights are positive empowerments rather than simply negative freedoms "to be let alone."

It should be quickly pointed out that Glendon is not arguing for the state socialism so spectacularly discredited in the last three years. The sociality that is missing from American rights talk is not achieved exclusively or even primarily through government. The "fine texture" of a civil society composed of families, neighborhoods, schools, groups at the workplace, labor unions, churches, and many other communities is as important to the development of personhood as is political community. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, has difficulty dealing with the forms of commu-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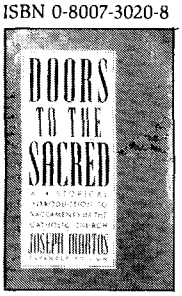

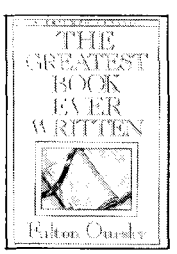

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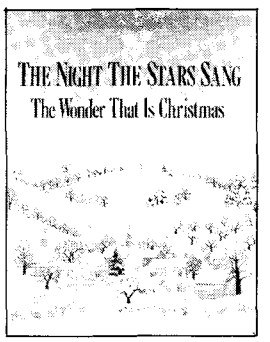

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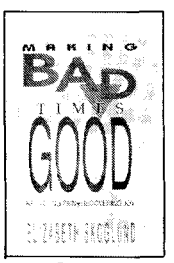

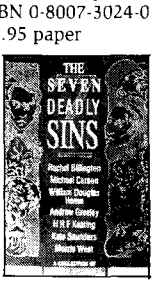

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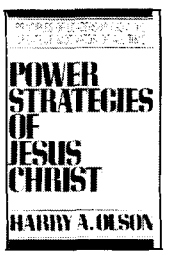

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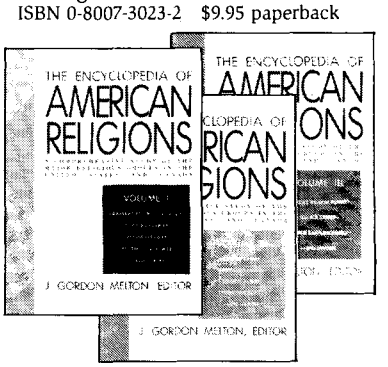

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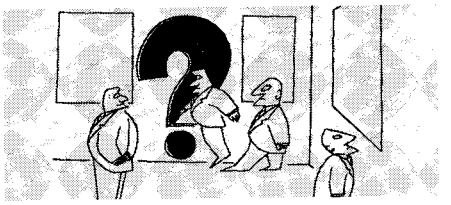
nity that stand between the individual and the state. For example, judicial discussions of the role of the family in public life increasingly dissolve into claims about the rights of individuals. The labor laws enacted in the 1930s supported unions and collective bargaining, but recent Court decisions make no reference to the importance of this associational activity and often subordinate it to the rights of individuals. The only nonstate form of community the Court seems to be able to bring into focus is the corporation viewed as a legal person endowed with rights.

Glendon is worried that American life is increasingly forced into a grid framed by individual freedom or oppressive communal control. Just as Eastern Europe is rediscovering the importance of a strong civil society as a precondition of freedom,



the language of the law in the U.S. is becoming mute on this crucial arena of solidarity. Glendon believes with Aristotle that the law has an educational function. So she calls for a recovery of the language of responsibility to the good of civil society in legal and political discourse.

She offers numerous specific examples of how an enrichment of the American rhetoric of rights by the language of solidarity might be brought about. More fundamentally, her argument shows that it would be premature to declare that the "American way" has been unambiguously vindicated by the downfall of totalitarian oppression. At issue is whether the United States can and should learn something from the stronger sense of solidarity present in other democracies. On the European continent, this solidarity appears concretely in areas such as economic support for children and for women facing abortion decisions or divorce, in health-care systems, in approaches to unemployment, retraining for new jobs, and the provision of necessities for the weak and vulnerable.

Glendon's defense of solidarity in civil society sometimes echoes the language of European social democracy; sometimes it has an accent often heard in neoconservative circles in the U.S. It resists being ideologically pigeonholed. I wish she were clearer on where the power of the government is needed to implement the rhetoric of solidarity she wants to hear in law and in public discourse. But perhaps this reluctance to make the issue of state intervention central is just what we need to break out of the constricted rhetoric shaped by the forty-year, East-West conflict.

The similarities between Glendon's argument and the recent papal and episcopal discussions of the moral core of public life are evident, even though they are left implicit in her text. The book makes a very important contribution to the effort to find an idiom to speak of a simultaneous concern for both freedom and solidarity that Americans can begin to understand. □

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DEATH IN HOLLAND

REGULATING DEATH
Euthanasia and the Case of the Netherlands
Carlos F. Gomez, M.D.
Free Press, $19.95, 172 pp.

Martin E. Marty

Children sometimes play with a game board which putatively reveals to them opinions they are not sure they know how to read and hold. The player holds a stick at the end of which is a string at the end of which, in turn, is a ball. On the left of the board is a "Yes" zone and on the right a "No." "Do I want a new bicycle instead of a week at camp?" Sooner or later, through a semi-involuntary impulse, the ball is to swing toward the proper zone. "No?" Off to camp!

Converse with fellow-citizens and you will likely find that not a few, perhaps most of them, play a kind of "yes" and "no" game in respect to euthanasia. Some may make up their minds that it is always wrong, *always* wrong; then they confront a situation of agony or meaninglessness in the face of which an unbidden tug pulls them toward a "yes": euthanasia may look like a proper course. Or others of them decide that it can *sometimes* be justifiable; then a case makes the headlines in which those who appeal to justifiability engage in life-cheapening acts. Henceforth: "no."

While such uncertainty does continue to color the minds of thoughtful people who take testimony from many sources, there seems also to be in our culture what Carlos F. Gomez, a physician, calls an "inexorable" motion toward easing moral and legal strictures against physician-aided death. As exceptional case after exceptional case makes its way to prime-time television panels, where spokespersons representing both sides or all sides are given equal time and all sound equally credible, it becomes ever easier to picture the normalization of pro-euthanasia policies and practices.

Taking testimony should be more of a problem for those who have previously leaned toward endorsement of relaxed policies, as they read Gomez's report on and ponder with him the situation in the Netherlands. That nation stands alone among the nations in its practice of permitting such physician-assisted termination (or killing, if you will), and it is often pointed to as the enlightened pathfinder for other nations.

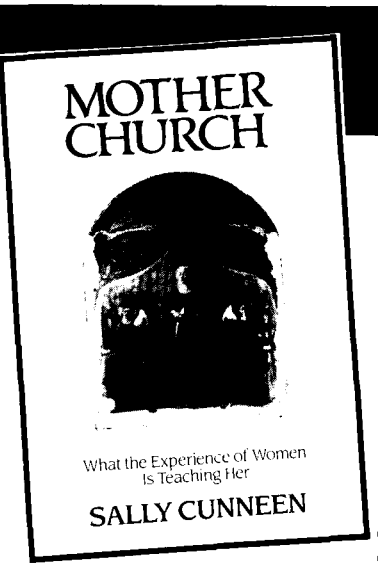
Gomez does not rely on a ouija-board-like "yes" and "no" device to find his mind and offer counsel. His testimony is a clearly cautionary and even emphatic "no": no, don't believe those who take courage and comfort from the Netherlands pioneering. The Dutch may have a reputation for precision and scrupulousness, but it is hard to see this good name sustained in the case of euthanasia.

Why? Gomez, who spent a month observing and interviewing in Amsterdam, finds there anything but clarity and care. The legal status of the act is itself unclear; euthanasia turns out to be a matter more winked at by the courts (since 1973) than formally legitimated by law. Perhaps laws are vague because, the doctor concludes, few of the people he interviewed, statements he read, or cases he studied suggested that those responsible had any clear definition of euthanasia in the first place.

Gomez, a medical resident at the University of Virginia and the holder of a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Chicago, who combines the conscience of an alert physician with the analytic skills of the informed academic, came home unimpressed. The subjects of euthanasia, according to the Netherlands policy, have to be asserting autonomy; their choices must be utterly voluntary. But hospitals are public institutions; though they desire to carve a "private space" to assist individuals in dying, their staffs gradually develop policies which compromise the whole notion of voluntariness.

A second criterion: there must be "unbearable suffering." Anyone who has dealt with a range of patients knows how relative such a term may be. Who is to discern the proper point on the scale at which assisting in bringing on death addresses a kind of objective state of "unbearable suffering"?

A clue to where the argument comes out is evident in the early pages where the author of the foreword leads the reader into the argument. He is Leon Kass, another



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physician, who is known for concerning himself with basic issues that have to do with the medical profession. And the basic one in this case is trust. Dare I enter a kind of covenantal relation with a physician if there is the hazard that she is to become the agent of my death? Kass asks this with and for us. Will all my declarations be indeed "voluntary," my "unbearable" sighs be misheard, my signals misread? Should physicians ever, under any circumstances or in any terms, be in the killing business?

Carlos Gomez took such questioning with him into the clinics of the Netherlands and came back with empirical evidence—not the last word, to be sure, but an important word—suggesting that trust breaks down, terms lose their meaning, and, in the name of dignity and autonomy, something important to the community and integral to definitions of human dignity tends to be lost in the blur of Netherlandish practices.

Gomez finds reason to support the "slippery slope" school of thought: start on a course of casually defined "passive euthanasia" and soon there is a move toward mild "active euthanasia." Next comes a more aggressive sort of killing.

The slippery slope notion may reveal a philosophy of history which implies a relentless pull away from concern for human life. Yet history is also full of counter-pulls, as if against the force of gravity. Sometimes people raise standards, inconvenience themselves, put the common good ahead of private comfort. Kass and Gomez, unless they are mere pessimists, must believe that their voices, raised at this stage, might counter the trends in an erosive time. They and those who follow them will now have to develop their own argument further to show how it, in the end, may be more humane than are the increasingly casual policies of support for physician-assisted death, for active euthanasia.

For the moment, Gomez is content to let the cases in the Netherlands speak largely for themselves. They might pull more minds than one toward the "no" pole in a time when the "yes" has begun to look increasingly acceptable on both sides of the Atlantic. □

ARGUING WITH MODERNITY

SIGNPOSTS IN A STRANGE LAND
Walker Percy
Edited with an introduction by Patrick Samway
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25, 428 pp.

Victor A. Kramer

Percy's "signposts" guide the modern wayfarer through an arid post-Christian world, one saturated with epistemological theories that this diagnostician-novelist is convinced are radically incoherent. Percy's nonfiction pieces, which document a thirty-odd-year search for answers by a bemused questioner, can be described as his songs in a strange land: "The Psalmist said sing a new song, and, for a fact, the old ones are pretty well worn-out." These essays are both lamentation and celebration. Percy analyzes what seems to be so wrong, but he also hopes that through art, literature, reading, even the imaginative use of television, we might find our way out of the desert.

These initially disconnected pieces, superbly edited by Patrick Samway, add significantly to Percy's total accomplishment. Percy, who died last year, had long been fascinated by questions about language and its relation to the mystery of human existence (see *The Message in the Bottle, Lost in the Cosmos*). The essays build on that fascination. "Diagnosing the Modern Malaise" is, in part, about the parallels between the literary-diagnostic method Chekhov used almost a hundred years ago and the strategy of the contemporary novelist who knows something is radically wrong in "a society...overtaken...by fragmentation rather than wholeness." Here, Percy outlines the dilemma of a novelist whose job is to report "that the modern world has ended, the world... informed by the optimism of the scientific revolution, rational humanism, and that Western cultural entity which...it has been more or less accurate to describe as Christendom."

Percy's argument with modern culture is linked to what he thought was humankind's ontological loss of self in a world where distractions (everything from myriads of theories to overwhelming quantities of consumer goods) increasingly compel people to in some sense forget about themselves. Throughout these meditations, Percy reminds us that "one's self is always a leftover from one's theory." His diagnosis of our spiritual homelessness frequently parallels Christopher Lasch's, who argues that our modern dependence on the therapeutic or so-called "helping profession" is symptomatic of our shrunken or "minimal self." Percy announces that humankind has surrendered the sovereignty of the soul for the pottage of the modern "personality." In "Culture, the Church, and Evangelization," written for a 1988 Vatican symposium, he argues that "the consumer of mass culture is lonely, not only lonely, but spiritually impoverished" and the church, "guarding the sacred deposit of the faith amid the tumultuous crosscurrents of culture and history," must serve "as the yeast which leavens the cultural lump."

This book collects forty-four pieces and is arranged in four sections: Life in the South; Science, Language, Literature; Morality and Religion; and an epilogue, interview, and self-interview. These varied essays provide a clearer picture of the Louisiana doctor-writer fascinated with facts about the eternal verities as well as the epistemological necessity of regional and particular attachments.

Many of the essays explore Percy's conviction that we must celebrate where we choose to be. Percy's appreciation of particular places (Covington, New Orleans, Georgia, Mississippi) is far from quaint, but rather affectionate and idiosyncratic. His queries about the Civil War, racism, and integration are ultimately not limited to peculiarities of the South, for he sees in these regional questions metaphors for how all might live. Already in 1957 he sur-

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mised that "the growing depersonalization of Southern life may not be such a bad thing....God writes straight...if the shrinkage of social intercourse to patio and barbecue pit serves no other purpose, it might yet provide a truly public zone where people are free to move about in a secure anonymity until the time comes when they might wish to be friends."

Percy's description of the morally paralyzed Southern gentleman of the past who "did live in a Christian edifice" might serve as commentary for today's lost wayfarers. The Southern gentleman, like us, knew of "the Decalogue, the Beatitudes, the doctrine of the Mystical Body" yet, curiously, he could not embrace what he knew. He lived "there in the strange fashion Chesterton spoke of, that of a man who will neither go inside nor put it [Christianity] entirely behind him as he stands forever grumbling on the porch.... How like him to go into Chancellorsville, or the Argonne, with Epictetus in his pocket; how unlike him to have had the Psalms." Percy's point is that the abstract moral distancing associated with Enlightenment rationalism no longer works: We somehow live and explore the mysteries of ourselves as we are embedded in a particular historical and existential context. This is why he loves Flannery O'Connor and thus perceives "the Christian culture of the South as, on the whole, a literary asset." In a group of three essays about the novel he surveys the possibilities and challenges for the artist "to humanize the life around him, to formulate it for someone else, to render the interstates...."

In the lead essay of part 2, "Is a Theory of Man Possible?" Percy answers "yes." However, his real question is: Does such a question make sense when the two traditional Western modes of thought, "Greco-Judeo-Christian and the scientific-organismic," may conceal more than they reveal? By our misapprehensions, or as Percy says, our "idolatry," we have become spiritually impoverished.

Witty; acerbic; cranky; insightful; hopeful, yet sometimes pessimistic, these essays point the way for the pilgrim, "Marcel's *Homo viator*, to explore further traditional notions" such as "falling prey to the worldliness of the world, and man as pilgrim seeking his salvation" through the mystery of signs, sacrament, and information. These essays will assist readers of Percy's fiction in understanding the novels, and draw new readers to his work. □

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TAKING SIDES IN GUATEMALA

SHATTERED HOPE
The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954
Piero Gleijeses
Princeton University Press, $29.95, 430 pp.

Paul Kantz

Recent reports from Central America indicate the Western Hemisphere's longest-running guerrilla conflict may finally be coming to an end. The country in question is not Nicaragua, where the eight-year *contra* war ended last year; nor El Salvador, though its eleven-year-old conflict also is the subject of serious, if slow-moving, peace efforts.

The country is Guatemala, Central America's most populous (9 million people) but oft-forgotten republic, where fighting between the ruthless military and Marxist-led rebels has flared and sputtered for some thirty years. Human rights groups have documented the murders or "disappearances" of 140,000 civilians during this period, mostly Maya Indians massacred by the armed forces or right-wing death squads. Such atrocities, never punished, still occur.

Conservative president Jorge Serrano, who chaired semiofficial talks with the guerrillas prior to his January 1991 election, has pledged that negotiations will soon bring

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peace. But disarming the roughly 2,000 rebel fighters will not end the killing. The oligarchy, beneficiary of the most unequal land distribution in the Americas, violently opposes even the slightest social reform; its assassins routinely silence those—students, labor leaders, peasant organizers—who dare call for change.

According to Piero Gleijeses, associate professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, this ongoing nightmare need never have happened. And, had it not been for Washington's clandestine intervention in Guatemala in the 1950s, it never would have.

In *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, Gleijeses chronicles the only stint of socially progressive governance in the country's tortured history. *Shattered Hope* does much more than retell the story of the CIA-orchestrated coup that, in June 1954, closed the coffin on reform. This forceful volume enables the reader to watch Guatemala's short-lived social revolution unfold—and unravel—from the inside. The best passages place the reader alongside ill-fated president Jacobo Arbenz, fretfully surveying the hostile forces—Washington, along with Somoza's Nicaragua and other Caribbean-area dictatorships—arrayed against him.

Arbenz, father of "the first true agrarian reform of Central America," came to power in 1951 after a landslide victory in elections whose relative fairness was owed to the political reforms of his predecessor, Juan Jose Arevalo.

Gleijeses's coverage, which draws on an intriguing mix of interviews, press accounts, and official documents, begins two decades earlier. Though Guatemala's massive injustices date to the days of the Spanish conquistadors, conditions under tin-horn dictator Jorge Ubico (1931-1944) chillingly demonstrate the attitudes and institutions Arbenz felt compelled to combat. A 1932 decree that, in effect, legalized murder by landowners, was barely necessary, Gleijeses writes. "Civilized Guatemalans had always understood the occasional need to kill an Indian."

Ubico resigned in 1944, after an unusual spasm of popular unrest. Two army-led juntas followed; the second permitted the election of Arevalo, who protected freedom of expression, ended forced rural labor, and instituted a forty-eight-hour work week. These moderate changes, while "sadly inadequate in terms of the peasants' needs...seemed revolutionary to the Guatemalan *latifundistas*," or large landowners.

Arbenz, a former army colonel, went further. "His presidency was marked by three departures," Gleijeses notes, "agrarian reform, close ties with the Communist party, [and] stubborn defiance of the United States."

The land reform, begun in 1952, redistributed idle parcels to roughly 100,000 peasant families.

Though the president was not a party member, Communists "were Arbenz's closest associates," and they helped him draw up and implement his programs. Thus Washington, gripped by McCarthyism, viewed the regime as a spearhead of Soviet expansionism. Gleijeses dismisses this fear: Moscow ignored its brethren in the obscure tropical locale.

Arbenz's defiance took several forms, including a bid to end U.S. domination of the economy. American companies controlled the railway and port systems, the electric company, and vital banana exports. Arbenz proposed infrastructure projects to lessen this dependence, and he tried to redistribute land holdings of United Fruit Company, the notorious banana giant.

Despite U.S. pressure, Arbenz refused to back away from either his plans or his Communist friends. It was a fatal decision. Washington armed a small band of disgruntled Guatemalans, led by ex-army officer Carlos Castillo Armas, which invaded from Honduras in June 1954.

The Guatemalan military was far superior, Gleijeses asserts. But it feared a direct U.S. invasion. So Arbenz—who had "provided Guatemala with the best government it has ever had"—went into exile at the army's request. Guatemala's dark night began.

Gleijeses's rendering is convincing, though some elements—an arms shipment to Guatemala from Czechoslovakia, for instance—suggest Washington's exaggerated fears were somewhat less unreason-

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able than he makes them out to be.

Shattered Hope is thoroughly documented—to the tune of 1,500 footnotes—so the reader has a solid, if opinionated, basis on which to make up his or her own mind. Gleijeses's bias—the view that Guatemala desperately needs Arbenz-type reforms—seems indisputable. And the John Hopkins prof's academic rigor does not prevent him from creating an accessible, lucid, almost journalistic account of an episode whose tragic consequences still reverberate.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 626)

a product of the Vatican II church either criticizes that church or, horror of horrors, expresses some admiration for that pre-Vatican II church he or she never knew. Those who were never reconciled to the council are at first thrilled, but then disappointed when they realize our admiration of the past is not without its criticism and our criticism of the present is not without its admiration.

If liberal and conservative Catholics would just realize that some of us "younger Catholics" are heartily sick of liberal/conservative squabbling and litmus tests (perhaps I'm the only one who is), the needed exchange would happen a lot sooner. I know the exchange is needed because it's very hard right now to look at Catholics and say "how they love one another." Both the *Wanderer* and the *National Catholic Reporter* seem to me equally venomous and I find both painful to read. I worry for our spiritual health as a church when I see such venom, such lack of courtesy. When politicians can generate knock-down, drag-out debates with more courtesy than Catholics, we're in trouble.

We seem to have gotten our minds off the real issue, saving souls, and onto a peripheral one, how to implement the council. This is the only point I really disagree on with Mr. Elie. He diagnoses the condition but fails to see its centrality. "Because you can't get all that worked up about young people going to hell, you mostly worry that if you fail to sponsor a Catholic identity in them, the religion you've known will go out of this corner of the world, and the kids will have missed out on something grand."

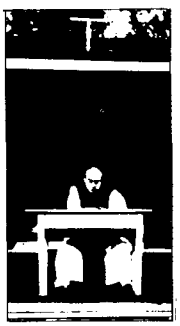
Have salvation and damnation disappeared? I think not. Are not people we see every day, *people we know*, being lost? To drugs? To a sexual morality that asks little or no commitment and sees the self as a product to be packaged and sold? Lost to a mindless materialism that really does see my own comfort as more important than other human beings and knows nothing of the liberating, self-sacrificial love that Jesus proclaimed?

Salvation and damnation exist all around us. Yet liberals and conservatives are so busy arguing about the arrangement of the deck chairs on the barque of Peter that they don't see the drowning multitudes overboard. If we would lift up our eyes and see them maybe then we could have the exchange Mr. Elie and I fervently hope for. The treasures old and new of the church today are meant for more than "something grand"; they are meant for salvation.

(REV.) ROBERT P. HYDE, JR.

(Continued on next page)

"Live by the Spirit"



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No generation gap

Pelham, N.Y.

To the Editors: Bravo to Paul Elie for suggeting that people stop labeling us "young Catholics" and focus instead on the faith we share. I'm uncomfortable with the "young adult" categorization. I'm glad there is concern for us, but I'd rather be considered a "regular adult" Catholic, not some separate species of not-quite-Catholic.

My friends and I (in our twenties and thirties) just join right in rather than sit around feeling different. Catholics my age are lectors, eucharistic ministers, members of the choir, and youth leaders. We've volunteered as R.C.I.A. sponsors and catechists, and work on retreat teams and programs for the homeless. Some take theology courses and study Scripture. Others offer their skills, from carpentry to public relations, to the church. Like other Catholics, we seek to discern what God has in mind for us and what this means in our careers and relationships. In short, we're trying to learn about and practice our faith. So please don't divide us from the rest. Our approach may be different, our backgrounds diverse, but we're all still Catholics. CATHERINE M. CORBIN

A self-stoppered church?

Glen Rock, N.J.

To the Editors: I agree with John Coleman's assessment that "'Stop the Church' gives a full dose of hateful and demonstrably untrue statements about the Catholic church...." ["ACT-UP v. the Church," September 27]. I also believe that the controversy did supersede concerns about the video's quality or content and should have had church involvement in the ensuing discussion on television....

Granted the extent of the scourge, the seeming apathy of parts of our society toward AIDS, and the desperate screams for help of those afflicted with it, "Stop the Church" was indeed a newsworthy event, not because of the quality of the documentary but because of the societal crisis it depicts.

However regrettable the event of December 10, 1989, in St. Patrick's Cathedral was, to argue that its depiction in a documentary should be censored on television in deference to Catholics as a minority deserving the same protection accorded other minorities ("PBS would never have shown such a bigoted and untruthful film about the women's movement, Jews, or blacks") seems to me to misunderstand the role of the church in today's society, and to encourage those who see it simply as a repressive institution.

We are some 54 million people in this country who identify ourselves as members of the Catholic church—a "minority," yes, but unlike any other. Perhaps more to the point, we have a vocal leadership which more frequently than not phrases its statements in authoritarian terms and challenges the most popular assumptions prevailing in our culture. It's not surprising that it gets a little warm at times in this kitchen.

Rather than trying to get this sorry documentary killed—and then, after failing in that, opting out of the type of discussion aired by KCET in Los Angeles and WNET in New York—I believe we should welcome the chance to have our value system gain a hearing. Are we afraid of dialogue on a subject of such significance in this society? RICHARD H. HIRSCH

The writer was secretary of communications with the United States Catholic Conference from 1979 to 1989.

McConnell on O'Malley

Trappist, Ky.

To the Editors: A double coincidence: Frank McConnell's article "O'Malley of Notre Dame" [September 27] appeared just as the first biography of Frank O'Malley, written by John Meaney and bearing the same title, made its appearance (University of Notre Dame Press). This happened as hundreds of O'Malley students were about to meet at Notre Dame in early October for "A Tribute to Frank O'Malley."

McConnell's article captures well something of what made Frank O'Malley the great and legendary teacher he was for so many. Besides his fine essays in *Review of Politics*, O'Malley made significant contributions to *Renaissance* and *Orate Fratres* (now *Worship*), and authored many unpublished works now in the Notre Dame Archives. My hope is that some day the most important writings of Frank O'Malley will be collected and published in a single volume. It would be a fitting tribute to one of the truly dedicated teachers of our time.

(BROTHER) PATRICK HART, O.C.S.O.

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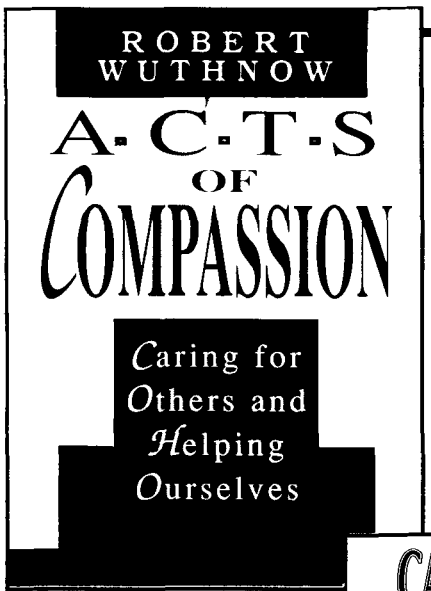

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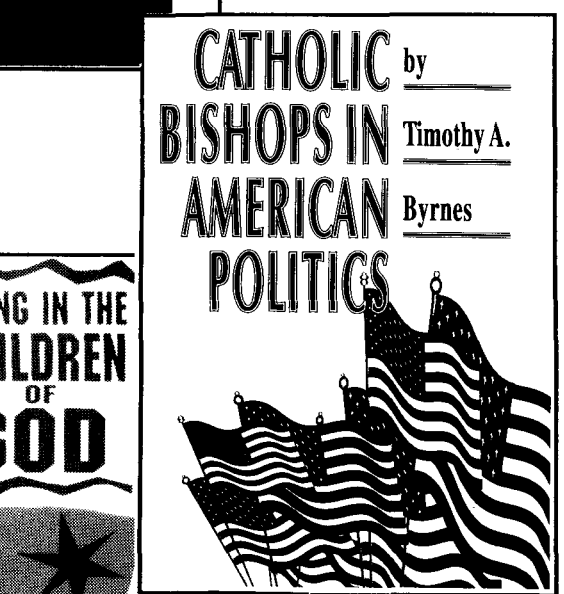

Timothy A. Byrnes

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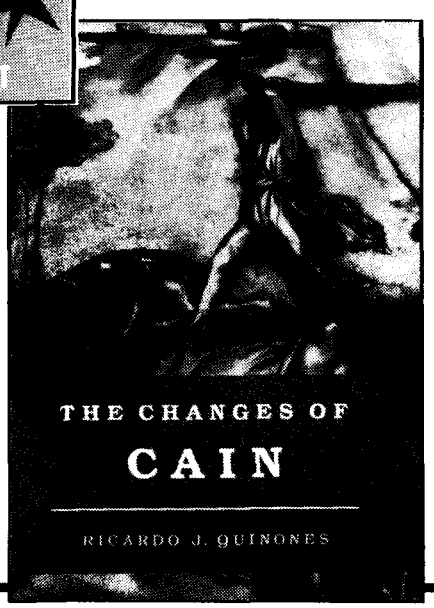

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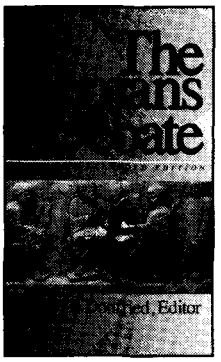

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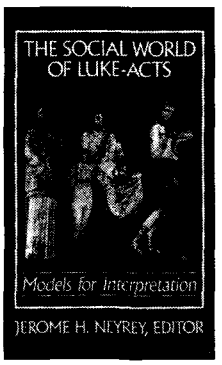

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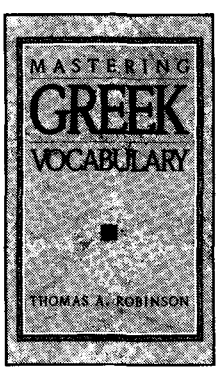

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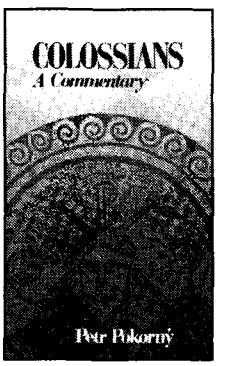

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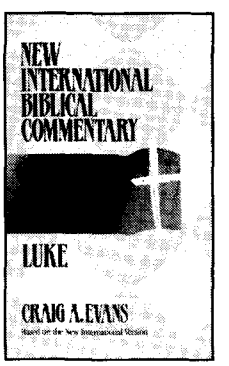

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